Learning to Lead: Teachers Unions and the Fight for Racial Equity in Education

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Abstract

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In this time of racial reckoning, education leaders face heightened responsibility to address the pervasive and enduring racism in our schools and systems. In particular, a wave of activism and attention to racial equity from educators and their unions highlight a powerful, yet unexamined, source of education leadership. As our federal government regularly promoted racist and xenophobic policies, and simultaneous state and national legislation dismantled unions, what does it mean for a teacher's union to prioritize racial equity as something that unions do? What new possibilities and challenges emerge when organized educators lead efforts to advance racial justice in schools? Drawing on Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT), a sociocultural learning theory, and the concepts of politicized trust and racialized boundaries, I examined the work of a teachers union in an urban district attempting to lead the implementation of a district-wide racial equity policy. I focused on the work of a group of women of color educators leading both their union's racial equity work and within the context of a district-union collaboration. I employed qualitative case study methodology to describe the day-to-day practice of leadership, and explain how racial justice leadership is enacted within a particular union context. Data

collected from 2018-2020 consisted of over 140 hours of qualitative interviews and observations, primarily focused on the women of color educators serving as "equity coaches" within the union's Center for Racial Equity (CRE) and their professional development sessions. Additional data included interviews with district leaders, observations of district racial equity trainings and school-based teams, and document analysis. Results of this study illuminated the dynamics and structures that impacted the practice of racial equity leadership by these women of color educators as they wrestled with the complexities and tensions embedded in equity-focused systems change. Specifically, I found that the formation of the CRE represented a critical prioritization of the knowledge and experiences of women of color, and provided a new pathway to leadership that crossed the traditional boundary of union work towards a more expanded role in systems leadership. Importantly, these leaders recognized the racialized and gendered boundaries inherent in their organizational contexts of the union and the district, and instead created a counter-space that aligned with their justice commitments and fostered a burgeoning sense of racialized solidarity and politicized trust. As such, they began developing a conception of racial equity leadership that centered relationships, care, trust, and solidarity. However, without a critical recognition of power dynamics, leadership capacity, and structures to engage in joint-work, racialized organizational boundaries reasserted themselves to reify dominant union-district dynamics that limited the CRE's ability to collectively exert influence beyond the CRE. The case of the CRE established teachers unions as powerful sites of collective leadership, particularly when we center the expertise of women of color. Ultimately, this study highlights possibilities for how we might imagine and enact racial justice leadership and the capacities that may need to be developed to authentically and sustainably engage in this work.

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Today I googled "how to write acknowledgments." I cannot seem to fathom how a few sentences written on a page or a series of names forever entombed in the dissertation archives could ever honor the relationships that kept me nourished (body, mind, soul, and belly) and sustained me throughout this entire process. But in case some of you like to periodically check to see where your name pops up on a google scholar search…this one's for you.

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Perhaps an adequate acknowledgment would have just been to say: I love you all so much.

Dedication

For Bala Patti

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Chapter 1: Introduction and Framing Literature

Introduction

September 8th, 2015. The scheduled beginning of a new school year for 53,000 students in Seattle Public Schools. But there would be no classes on the 8th or even the next day. Their teachers were on strike. After four months of contentious bargaining negotiations, the Seattle Education Association (SEA) and the school district could not reach a contract agreement and for the first time in 30 years, the SEA unanimously approved a strike. Union officials and district leaders took turns blaming the other for the contract embargo with accusations of "greedy" teachers asking for unrealistic salaries and "heartless" district administrators refusing to fund the schools children deserve. Media outlets both praised and demonized the teachers' actions while families anxiously awaited an outcome. After 5 days of striking, an agreement was reached. However, among the 209-page collective bargaining agreement there was something unusual and unprecedented, a joint union-district initiative to create school-based teams to address issues of racial equity.

The Seattle strike of 2015 is only one of a long list of teacher strikes that have swept across the country[1] in the past several years (Anderson, 2020; Blanc, 2019; Will, 2018; Uetricht, 2014), yet the explicit attention to racial equity is unique and intriguing. While many of the teacher strikes did include broader issues of social justice and education equity (i.e. increasing public funding for education, more counselors not cops, addressing disproportionate discipline etc.), the Seattle case advanced a particular theory of change that centers the leadership of educators, in equity-focused school and system transformation; an expansion on the role of unions. Second, although collective bargaining contracts include many points of collaboration

[1] 2018-2019 in particular saw the #Red4Ed movement that began in southern states and expanded nationwide

across a district and a union (such as teacher recruitment, retention, and evaluation) this was a unique avenue of partnership conceptualizing and operationalizing racial equity leadership. While equity and inquiry teams exist elsewhere (Bensimon, 2005; Galloway & Ishimaru, 2019), Seattle has specifically created racial equity teams through a district-union collaboration and the Seattle Education Association is the only union, thus far, to have established their own Center for Racial Equity. Thus, my dissertation explores a novel case to illuminate the dynamics and complexities of leading new efforts for racial-equity focused systems change, while centering a teachers union as a critical site of leadership and transformation.

Importantly, my engagement with the Center for Racial Equity and the Seattle Education Association took place during an unprecedented time of racial reckoning with the rise of the #BlackLivesMatter movement juxtaposed against the emboldened white supremacists with the election of Donald Trump. At this particular moment in history our federal government actively and openly promoted racist and xenophobic policies (Giroux, 2020; Horsford, 2018) while our education system doubled down on the "new racism" of neoliberal, market-based, and color-evasive reforms (Au, 2016; Annamma, Jackson, & Morrison, 2017; Green & Castro, 2017; Bonilla-Silva, 2013; Kohli, Pizarro, & Nevarez, 2017, Trujillo & Renee, 2015) that would last long beyond a Presidency. In addition, we experienced a sharp increase in conservative state and national legislation aimed at restricting collective bargaining power and dismantling unions (Goldstein & Green, 2018; Marianno et al., 2017), a trend that has continued. And yet nationally teachers unions are making public commitments to racial equity and justice, such as passing resolutions condemning white supremacy culture in schools, aligning with the Movement for Black Lives, partnering with organizations like the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) , the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), and UnitedWeDream

to protect Black, Brown, and immigrant children; they are resisting and revolting like never before (AFT, 2016; AFT, 2020; Alliance to Reclaim Our Schools, 2017; Dandala, 2019; NEA Center for Social Justice, 2021). In such a precarious landscape, what does it mean for a teachers union to prioritize racial equity as something that unions do? What new possibilities and challenges emerge when unions lead efforts to advance racial justice in schools?

Problem Statement and Rationale: Why unions?

While there are particularities of this present sociopolitical context, the impacts of a schooling system rooted in colonization, assimilation, and oppression endure (Khalifa, 2018; Wolfe, 2006; Smith, 1999). Despite growing attention to issues of equity, students of color continue to face racialized disparities in experiences, opportunities, and educational outcomes (Brayboy, Castagno, Maughan, 2007; Gooden & Dantley, 2012; Gutiérrez & Jaramillo, 2006). Given the complexity and pervasiveness of racism in schools and society, we need to investigate both new contexts and organizational actors that hold potential for creating more racially just schools and systems.

Education leadership is critical to disrupting these deep inequities and building more race-conscious cultures, climates, policies, and practices (Diem & Welton, 2020; Furman, 2012; Ishimaru & Galloway, 2014; Irby, 2018). As school districts across the country are increasingly taking up racial equity initiatives (Curry-Stevens et al, 2013), teachers unions, as powerful political organizations with professional expertise, could be critical sources of education leadership. Even though unions hold considerable influence in education policies and practices, there is a dearth of research that frames and studies teacher unions as sites of leadership (Bangs & MacBeath, 2012; Bascia, 1997, Johnson et al, 2009). The education leadership field has traditionally focused on individual school and district formal leaders (i.e. principals and

superintendents), including a robust body of critical scholarship on culturally responsive, anti-racist, and justice-focused leadership (DeMatthews & Mahwhinny, 2014; Horsford, 2014; Khalifa, Gooden, & Davis, 2016, Theoharis, 2010). In addition, recent critical scholarship has pushed on this construction of leadership as individuals to also recognize the collective leadership of youth, families, and communities of color, towards education justice (see Bertrand and Rodela, 2017). This shift highlights an opportunity to continue to expand what education leadership is, who leads, and consider how education organizations, such as unions, enact equity leadership.

Further, academic research on teachers unions has largely focused on the impact of bargaining agreements on district reforms and student outcomes (Osborne-lampkin, Cohen-vogel, Feng, & Wilson, 2018) or historical accounts of unions as spaces of teacher organizing and labor activism (Goldstein, 2015; Murphy, 1990). We have yet to explore and analyze the ways educators are learning to leverage their professional expertise and position as teachers to collectively advance racial justice. As such, this dissertation examines a teachers union not simply as a source of labor or activism, but as an education organization with the capacity to shape and lead equity initiatives.

Teachers unions are in a unique position to lead more equitable schools and systems as organized bodies of educators who hold professional expertise and political power. Importantly, teachers unions hold promise by being classroom educators. Specifically, literature in teacher leadership suggests that educators should be central to reform efforts because they are the closest to practice and hold critical expertise about classrooms and schools (Wenner & Campbell, 2016; York-Barr & Duke, 2004). They can be powerful drivers of ground-up transformation (Baker-Doyle, 2017). Further, teachers as the implementers of education reforms they have unique

knowledge and valuable insight. Furthermore, racial equity policies often hinge on the work of teachers as improving student learning, which depends on improving the quality of teaching and capacity of teachers (Darling-Hammond, 2010). Addressing issues of disproportionate discipline or changing deficit mindsets of teachers towards students of color requires a change in educator behavior and practice. Specifically, teachers of color hold promise in leading these racial equity focused reforms (Pizarro & Kohli, 2020).

Through engaging in their unions, educators have the opportunity to break from the isolation of their classrooms and develop relationships and networks with other educators from across the district, creating the possibility for collaboration, sharing expertise and resources. Compared to top-down mandated policies, working within the union offers teachers the opportunity to bring their knowledge, histories, and expertise to co-create solutions and engage in processes of collective learning (Bascia, 2000). This opens the possibility for more authentic, effective and equitable change. Thus, it is at the intersection of racial equity, teaching, and learning where teachers unions could - in theory - hold power in shaping the policies and practices that impact the experiences and outcomes for students of color.

In addition, Bascia (2000) suggests that the ways a union approaches opportunities for leadership, decision-making, responsiveness to educator needs, learning and development, as well as how a union frames discourses around teachers and teaching can serve as an important source of teacher socialization. She contends:

> Teachers unions help to define and maintain expectations for what teachers can legitimately do and know. They can participate in reproducing a narrow, technical conception of teaching—or they can attempt to challenge prevailing norms by providing alternative visions, opportunities to develop new under standings, and opening access for teachers to the larger educational systems in which they work. (Bascia, 2000, p. 396)

In this way, there is a potential for the union to play a significant role in shaping educator norms, assumptions, and practices regarding racial equity and the extent to which teachers are positioned as leaders in the work.

Finally, teachers unions wield considerable political power as the "voice" of educators in shaping education agendas through local decision-making structures, such as school boards and collective bargaining agreements, as well as significant lobbying power at the state and national level (Kahlenberg, 2006; Marianno, 2018; Moe, 2006; Strunk & Grissom, 2010). In addition, teachers unions operate at multiple levels including the school, district, state, and national (Bascia & Stevenson, 2017) providing formal structures to influence and support broader systemic change efforts.

However, it is important to acknowledge that unions are highly varied (e.g. contracts, agendas, scope, influence etc.) across states and districts with several states prohibiting or limiting the scope of collective bargaining (Johnson et al, 2009; Strunk et al, 2018; Winkler, Scull, & Zeehandelaar, 2012). And, while there has been movement in some teachers unions towards goals of educator empowerment, leadership, and collective learning as well as a greater attention to issues of equity ((Bascia, 2000; Bascia & Stevenson, 2017; Koppich, 2006; Johnson et al, 2009; National Education Association, 2017; Weiner, 2012), the research is extremely limited on the processes and practices within unions to achieve these aspirations. In sum, there is considerable potential for teachers unions to be powerful actors in equity-oriented reforms and we still need to understand how unions are actually engaging in this work. As such, my dissertation examines one teachers union, through their Center for Racial Equity, as an underexplored source of education leadership to advance racial equity.

Research Questions

This is fundamentally a study about leadership: who leads, how we lead, and what do we lead towards? Specifically, I focused on the dynamics and structures that impacted the practice of organizational leadership for racial equity within a teachers union. To this end, my study explores the leadership activity of a group of women of color educator leaders, called "coaches," within the union's Center for Racial Equity. These educator leaders were each members of their own school's Racial Equity Team and assigned to coach a new Racial Equity Team, school-based teams to address racial disparities created through the district-union partnership and codified in the collective bargaining agreement. I centered the collective learning process of these coaches and their Director as they gathered monthly to develop their own racial equity leadership and their collective leadership as the Center for Racial Equity.

To that end, I explored the following research questions:

- What are the leadership activities of a racial equity-focused center within a teachers union?
- How, and to what end, does their leadership activity evolve over time?
- How do politicized trust and organizational boundaries shape their leadership activity?

Through these questions I considered teachers unions as powerful organizational contexts for education leadership and highlight the collective leadership of educators of color as they wrestled with the complexities and tensions embedded in equity-focused systems change.

Roadmap of the dissertation

In the remainder of this chapter, I frame this study in the literature on education leadership and teacher leadership towards equity-focused change. I then consider the role of teachers unions as agents of change in education policy and practice and recent movements

towards social justice, to argue for their conceptualization as sites of education leadership for equity. The next chapter introduces my theoretical framework and methodology. I argue for the consideration of sociocultural learning theories in the study of leadership by drawing upon Cultural Historical Activity Theory and specifically the importance of boundaries and the role of politicized trust in collective change efforts. I use qualitative research methods of observations and interviews to explore the dynamics, complexities, and tensions in the leadership activity of the Center for Racial Equity. Chapters 3 through 5 present findings from this study. Chapter 3 discusses the development of politicized trust within the Center for Racial Equity as a key leadership activity. Chapter 4 examines the objects of leadership activity and an evolving understanding of racial equity leadership within the Center for Racial Equity. Chapter 5 catalogues a relational rupture between the union and the district that highlights the ways organizational and institutional boundaries shape the leadership activity of the Center for Racial Equity. Chapter 6 discusses the implications of this work and considerations for research, practice, partnership, and theory.

Framing Literature

In the following sections I ground my study in relevant scholarship to argue for the conceptualization of teachers unions as sites of organizational leadership for equity. I begin by offering my working definitions of "racial equity" and "organizational leadership for equity" to understand leadership as a collective activity towards expansive visions of justice. I then situate my work within the field of equity-oriented education leadership and unpack how we have approached the study of leaders, educators, and teachers unions. I end with the emerging tensions and possibilities for teachers unions as sources of organizational leadership for racial equity towards systemic transformation.

Unpacking Racial Equity

The language of racial equity has quickly proliferated in education discourse; however, the definition of the term often remains ambiguous. In particular, these conversations are often built upon assumptions and goals of "equality" that are based on ideas of "sameness and fairness" that promote color-evasive[2] or race-neutral approaches to improving education outcomes for students of color and have ignored the deeply rooted historical inequities and racialized practices that continue to minoritize racially, culturally, and linguistically diverse communities (Brayboy et al, 2007; Gutiérrez & Jaramillo, 2006). For example, focusing on the "achievement gap" constructs a deficit-based argument for equality and not equity in that the goal is for students of color to "catch up" to their white counterparts (Jordan, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 2006). According to this notion, the problem lies within students and families of color who are unable to "achieve" according to educational metrics such as standardized tests[1] and thus are inferior or lacking the necessary knowledge and skills to be as successful as white students. While education outcome metrics, such as test scores, play an important role in systemic equity initiatives (Datnow, Greene, & Gannon-Slater, 2017; Khalifa, Gooden, & Davis, 2016; Knapp, Copland, & Swinnerton, 2007; Skrla, Scheurich, Garcia, & Nolly, 2004), solely "gap gazing" (Gutiérrez, 2008) can reinforce whiteness as the norm, assimilation as the goal, and erase the multiple identities of students.

Instead, equity moves away from notions of the achievement gap and framing of students of color as deficient, to acknowledge and address, as Gloria Ladson-Billings (2006) calls it, the "education debt" or the systematic sociopolitical, historical, economic, and moral exclusion and oppression of people of color in the U.S. (Ladson-Billings, 2006). Equity recognizes that racial

[2] See Annamma, Jackson, and Morrison (2017) for a discussion on the use of the term "color-evasive" as an anti-ableist re-framing on the concept of colorblind racism.

disparities in educational opportunities and outcomes have been accumulated, "as a result of centuries of neglect and denial of education to entire groups of students" (Ladson-Billings, 2007, p. 321). Given the uneven playing field and varied histories of racialized communities, implementing the same "one size fits all" race-neutral programs, practices, and policies are insufficient to remedy the education debt. Instead, equity may require an *unequal* distribution of resources and opportunities in order to achieve justice (Brayboy et al, 2007) and equity-oriented reforms must go beyond ensuring "equal access" to resources, opportunities, and high quality teaching and work to dismantle and transform "historical practices and ideologies that preserve [white] supremacy" (Gutiérrez & Jaramillo, 2006).

Importantly, my conceptualization of racial equity draws upon other scholars who highlight the importance of not only attempting to "undo the wrongs" of the colonial project of schooling but to also support, reclaim, and sustain the future we want to see for students and communities of color (Paris & Alim, 2017; Patel, 2015; Smith, 2013; Tuck, 2009). This includes prioritizing the knowledges and cultural practices of communities of color as well as advancing the agency, power, leadership, and self-determination of people of color in schools and systems (Brayboy et al, 2007; Ladson-Billings, 2006; Yosso, 2005).

In this dissertation I intentionally use the term racial equity to explicitly center race in the pursuit of education justice. Centering race does not mean ignoring other forms of inequity, but instead acknowledges the ways systems of oppression (i.e. heterosexism, xenophobia, monolingualism, classism, colonialism, ableism etc.) intersect and collude to perpetuate inequities for people of color (Crenshaw, 1991; Delgado & Stefanic, 2000). I used this definition of racial equity to ground my study of the Center for Racial Equity as a foundation deeply rooted in Indigenous and critical race theories (Dixon & Anderson, 2018; Kovach, 2009; Ladson-

Billings & Tate, 1995; Smith, 1999) that fundamentally shapes all parts of the research process including my conceptualizations of leadership and what we lead towards.

Conceptualizing Leadership Beyond Individuals

Traditional studies of leadership have focused on the traits or characteristics of individual leaders with formal positional authority. In this trait approach, leadership is something that is possessed by particular individuals at the top of hierarchies (see Northouse, 2015). However, scholarship in education leadership has shifted from this conception of education leadership as characteristics of an individual to understand leadership as what leaders do and the actions they take. In particular, this approach moves beyond only considering individuals with positional authority in a formal role (such as principals or superintendents), to more relational approaches that define leadership as a socially constructed process, neither a fixed position nor quality, that must be understood in organizational context (Alvesson, 1996; Ospina & Su, 2009; Uhl-Bien, 2006). Similarly, Spillane (2005) challenges the hierarchical, "heroic", individualistic, notions of leadership by advancing distributed leadership theory, where leadership is "stretched over" multiple individuals and the focus is on leadership *practice* that is generated through interaction. As Spillane, Halverson, and Diamond (2004) define it, "leadership is the activities engaged in by leaders, in interaction with others in particular contexts around specific tasks" (5). Drawing from learning theories of activity and cognition, distributed leadership theory is a marked shift in education leadership towards understanding the enactment of leadership as situated in place and mediated by relationships. I recognize the work of these scholars in building my conceptualization of leadership as a relational practice.

Leadership for Equity

Importantly, a growing body of research has begun examining the role of education leaders as leaders for social justice, by addressing inequities, particularly for students of color and other marginalized and underserved populations in schools and systems (Dantley & Tillman, 2010; Evans, 2007; Goldfarb & Grinberg, 2002; Cambron-McCabe & McCarthy, 2005; Theoharis, 2007). As Dantley and Tillman (2010) state, "leadership for social justice investigates and poses solutions for issues that generate and reproduce societal inequities" (p. 20). In particular, scholarship in the areas of social justice leadership, transformative leadership, and culturally responsive leadership all frame issues of equity as central to education leadership and highlight the need for leaders to recognize their own complacency in perpetuating these inequities and their moral obligation to disrupt and challenge policies and practices that continue to uphold an oppressive system (Bensimon, 2005; Brooks & Witherspoon-Arnold, 2013; Brown, 2004; Dantley & Tillman, 2010; Diem & Welton, 2020; Evans, 2007; Furman, 2012; Ishimaru & Galloway, 2014; Khalifa et al, 2016; Marshall & Oliva, 2006; Shields, 2010; Theoharis, 2007; Welton & Zamani-Gallaher, 2018). Specifically, critical race scholars have highlighted the continued salience of explicitly centering race in education leadership to disrupt race-neutral or color-evasive (Annamma, Jackson, & Morrison, 2017) approaches that treat all people as equal instead of interrogating whiteness (Aléman, 2009; Gooden & Dantley, 2012; Lopez, 2003; Parker & Villalpando, 2007; Pollack & Zirkel). Khalifa, Dunbar, & Douglas (2013) argue these are "dishonest discourses" that "only serve to fossilize racialized systems of oppression" (p. 493). For example, a burgeoning body of explicitly race-conscious work has attended to issues of race talk and the use of data informed inquiry to make visible the racialized rhetoric, dynamics, and practices that perpetuate racial disparities (Bensimon, 2005; Carter et al., 2017; Horsford, 2014; Irby, 2018; Scheurich & Skrla, 2003; Skrla, Scheurich, Garcia, & Nolly, 2004).

Additionally, scholars have highlighted the culturally specific leadership practices of leaders of color and the ways their experiences and identities contribute to outcomes of equity and justice (Gooden, 2005; Jean-Marie, 2005; Johnson, 2007; Khalifa, 2012; Lomotey, 1987; Murakami, Hernandez, Mendez-Morse, & Byrne-Jimenez, 2015; Rodela & Rodriquez-Mojica, 2020; Santamaría, 2014; Tillman, 2005). For example, Santamaría (2014) studied a multi-ethnic group of leaders of color across the k-12 and higher education leadership spectrum to examine the ways they tap into the positive aspects of their own identities to lead for social justice and equity. She highlights how leaders of color, due to their experiences and perspectives, "possess a unique leadership skill set that lends itself well to addressing some of the contemporary challenges at the forefront of societal issues in the United States and globally" (Santamaría, 2014, p. 383). Others highlight how White leaders, in particular, may struggle with discussing issues of race (Singleton & Linton, 2006), thus it is critical to break the "pathologies of silence" (Shields, 2004) and enact strategies to undermine whiteness ideology and develop racial awareness (Gooden & Dantley, 2012; Rusch & Horsford, 2009; Theoharis & Haddix, 2011; Young & Liable, 2000).

However, it is important to note that being a leader of color does not inherently make you a culturally responsive leader, as administrators of color are also impacted by white supremacy and normative deficit discourses that can lead to "internalized oppression" (Aléman, 2009), feelings of racial inferiority (Khalifa, 2015), and potentially contribute to exclusionary and oppressive practices (Flessa, 2010; Gooden, 2012; Khalifa, 2013). Thus, it is imperative that all leaders engage in critical self-reflection to recognize and confront ideologies of "race-neutrality, ahistorical, white supremacy, colonialism/postcolonialism, along with other

epistemologies that ultimately all lead to aberrant, deficit characterizations and treatment of minoritized students" (Khalifa, Gooden, & Davis, 2016, p. 1286).

While much of the equity-focused leadership literature still examines individual, formal school/system leaders, some scholars have advocated that leadership towards equity and justice should construct leadership as broader than formal positional leaders and instead be inclusive, through the sharing of power among members of the school community and enactment of more democratic forms of leadership (Brooks & Miles, 2010; Evans, 2007; Kezar & Carducci, 2007; Marshall & Oliva, 2006). Specifically, there is an explicit push from critical education leadership scholars to expand the practice of leadership to center nondominant families and communities of color by attending to power dynamics and their agency towards their own visions of equity and education justice (Bertrand & Rodela, 2017; Cooper; 2009; Ishimaru, 2018; Khalifa, 2012; Lac & Cumings Mansfield, 2018; Welton & Freelon, 2018).

Organizational Leadership for Equity

In this study, I follow Ishimaru and Galloway's (2014) definition of *organizational leadership* to represent a conceptualization of leadership, which recognizes the importance and power of individuals in formal authority positions but extends beyond these individuals to include the broad range of actors interacting to enact leadership. Thus, the unit of analysis becomes the collective enactment or activity of leadership practice as opposed to the actions of individual leaders.

Specifically, Ishimaru & Galloway's definition of organizational leadership centers equity in leadership activity as both the process of leadership and outcome of leadership. By bringing together strands of social justice leadership, transformative leadership, and culturally responsive leadership they define organizational leadership for equity as "leadership practices

that facilitate or constrain equitable education systems" (Ishimaru & Galloway, 2014, p. 100). While their work primarily attends to schools and school districts as focal organizations, my study offers an opportunity to extend this conceptualization of organizational leadership to a new context of a teachers union (and teacher leaders) to develop a deeper understanding of how organizational leadership may be enacted in other education organizations seeking equity.

Teacher leadership

While many studies of education leadership center administration, with an assumed "trickle down approach" that they will impact teachers, the field of teacher leadership explicitly positions teachers themselves as valuable and influential sources of education leadership towards aims of instructional improvement and school reform (Brooks et al., 2004; Cohran-Smith, 1991; Curtis, 2013; Danielson, 2006; Killion et al., 2016; Lambert, 2003; Muijs & Harris, 2006; Murphy, 2005; Neito, 2007; Wenner & Campbell, 2016; York & Barr, 2004). The literature suggests that teachers may be more likely to adopt reforms when lead by their peers (Weiss, Cambone, & Wyeth, 1992) and tend to benefit from (through better and more relevant) professional development presented by teacher leaders (Carpenter & Sherretz, 2012; Hickey & Harris, 2005; Vernon-Dotson, 2008; Westfall-Rudd, 2011).

The field of teacher leadership has embraced a more collaborative notion of leadership, with many scholars drawing on distributed leadership[3] (Firestone & Martinez, 2007; Gronn, 2000; Harris, 2013; Klein et. al, 2018; McKenzie & Locke, 2014; Muijs & Harris, 2003; Wenner & Cambell, 2016) towards more democratic and collaborative practices. However, there were exceedingly few pieces that focused on issues of equity and justice. For example, Neito (2007) explored how teachers demonstrate leadership towards social justice more broadly, Podjsasek's

[3] However, as Mayrowetz (2008) points out, the term distributed leadership has widely been used to mean "shared" or "democratic" leadership as opposed to the original theory.

(2009) dissertation discussed gender through a study of women teacher leaders and their views on leadership, and Larrabee and Morehead (2010) called for increased attention to LBG issues in teacher leadership. A couple pieces focused on teacher leadership preparation programs and how they developed critically conscious and equity focused leaders (Bradley-Levine, 2012; Jacobs, 2012). Lac and Diamond (2019) explicitly centered racial equity by exploring the work of two teacher leaders as they conducted a racial equity book study within their school and the tensions with administration. Most notably, Bradely-Levin (2018) draws on frameworks of critical pedagogy, ethical leadership, and collaborative leadership to put forth the concept of critical teacher leadership to address a glaring gap of theoretically-driven[4], equity-focused scholarship within teacher leadership. Specifically, she addresses the work of informal teacher leaders who advocate for marginalized students as a practice of teacher leadership (Bradley-Levin, 2018). Taken together, these studies highlight the powerful actions of individual educator leaders towards equity and/or describe the complexity of changing beliefs and practices in becoming an equity-focused leader. However, they do not explore the collective leadership activity of educators and largely use broader terms of social justice and equity, over being explicitly race-conscious.

Given the importance of teacher leadership and increased roles and expectations of teacher leaders (Danielson, 2011; Lieberman, 2013; National Education Association, 2020; U.S. Department of Education, n.d.), there has not been significant movement in the field towards equity-focused teacher leadership (Jacobs, Gordon, & Solis, 2016). In sum, the teacher leadership literature highlights how educators are well positioned to lead reform efforts in

[4] She is responding to both the lack of equity-focused scholarship and a critique that the field of teacher leadership is "largely atheoretical" (Wenner & Campell, 2016),

schools; but greater attention to issues of racial equity is required towards justice-centered transformation.

Further, the literature in teacher leadership largely considers the ways educators are leading beyond their classrooms but within the same school. In fact, one common definition of teacher leadership stipulates that educators maintain their role in the k-12 classroom in addition to leadership responsibilities (Bagley & Margolis, 2018; Beachum & Dentith, 2004; Margolis, 2012; Mangin & Stoelinga, 2008). For example, in their literature review of teacher leadership, Wenner and Cambell (2016) excluded studies pertaining to teacher leaders serving as math or literacy coaches or in district instruction or coordinator positions because they were not actively engaged in their own classroom. However, other studies do consider the formal district-based roles of individual teachers as providers of professional development, curriculum, coordination, and instructional support as teacher leadership (Hickey & Harris, 2005; Lieberman, 1992; Mangin, 2005; Smylie, 1997). In particular, studies in leadership that have explored the benefits of teams, collaboration, and professional learning communities have been largely based in individual schools (Eckert, 2019; Fullan, 1994; Hairon, Goh, & Chua, 2015; Hargreaves & Fink, 2006; Lieberman & Miller, 2008; Scribner, Sawyer, Watson, & Myers, 2007; Westheimer, 2008). While the field of teacher leadership is nebulous with multiple definitions (Harris & Muija, 2003; Neumerski, 2012; Margolis & Huggins, 2012), there is a dearth of research on collective teacher leadership efforts towards district-level change. As such, there is an opportunity to expand the power of teacher leadership and elevate their expertise to address systemic change.

Finally, there is a call in this literature for external supports such as professional development and training as well as opportunities to form networks and partnerships with other

teacher leaders beyond the school walls to support the development of teacher leadership (Brosky, 2011; Edge & Mylopoulos, 2008; Wenner & Campbell, 2016; Yonezawa et al, 2011). To this end, there has been a recent boom in the investment in and proliferation of teacher networks across the country (Berry, 2019). These teacher networks might be particularly important for teacher leaders of color and teaching social justice (Durias, 2012; Ritchie, 2012). Thus, there is a ripe opportunity to explore and expand our understanding of teacher leadership to consider the ways educators are collectively leading beyond their individual schools to impact systems, particularly in equity-focused reforms.

Educators of Color as Leadership

Research has shown the benefit of teachers of color to student, particularly students of color, educational outcomes and experiences (Boyle-Baise & Sleeter, 2000; Dee, 2004, 2005; Egalite et al., 2015; Fox; 2015; Gershenson et al., 2016; Holt & Gershenson, 2015; Ingersoll & May, 2009; Mabokela & Medsen, 2007; Tenebaum & Ruck, 2007; Villegas & Jordan Irvine, 2010). In addition, evidence suggests many teachers of color have a heightened awareness of the sociopolitical contexts of racism and inequities, deep commitments to equity and justice, and employ culturally sustaining practices (Brown, 2009; Burciaga & Kohli, 2018; Dingus, 2008; Dixon, 2003; Hilliard, Perry, & Steele, 2003; Irizarry & Donaldson, 2012; Kohli, Lin, Ha, & Shini, 2019; Kohli & Pizarro, 2016). However, schools have struggled to retain teachers of color (Achinstein, Ogawa, Sexton, & Freitas, 2010; Ingersoll & May, 2009). With schools being comprised of over 80% white teachers (National Center for Education Statistics, 2017-2018), educators of color are not only underrepresented but face racial harm. Critical scholars have documented the impacts of racial macro and microaggressions such as the “hostile” work environments for teachers of color, feelings of being silenced or invisible with white colleagues,

the lack of resources to appropriately take up issues of race, and often experience increased burnout from the stress and additional burden of being responsible for equity work (Achinstein & Aguirre, 2008; Dingus, 2008; Kohli, 2009; Kohli, 2018; Kohli & Solarzano, 2012; Lisle-Johnson & Kohli, 2020; Sheets & Chew, 2002; Montecinos, 2004). Specifically, scholars have named the concept of racial battle fatigue or the "psychological, emotional, physiological, energy, and time-related cost of fighting against racism" (Smith, 2009, p. 298) particularly as it relates to the impacts on educators of color in predominantly white spaces and professions (Pizarro & Kohli, 2020; Smith, Allen, and Danley, 2007; Smith, Yosso, and Solorzano, 2006).

While it is imperative to improve the equity-climate, culture, and resources of schools as well as the racial literacy (Gunier, 2004) of educators and administration to promote the recruitment and retention of teachers of color (Achinstein, Ogawa, & Sexton, 2010; Haddix, 2017; Kokka, 2016; Pizarro & Kohli, 2020), an emerging body of scholarship advocates for the elevation of educators of color as leadership towards equity-focused change (Kohli et al, 2021; Kohli & Pizarro, 2016; Kohli, 2018). For example, Kohli (2018) highlights the lack of leadership opportunities for critical educators of color, how they are overlooked for leadership positions, and the need to explicitly build leadership skills to counteract the structural racism of K-12 schools. Kohli & Pizarro (2016) call for educators of color to have a voice on leadership teams and in policy making spaces to bring their cultural wealth and community-oriented perspectives and relationships to the forefront of education reforms. Most notably, Kohli et al. (2021) explicitly discuss the leadership actions of critical educators of color in their schools and districts facilitated through their engagement in the Institute for Teachers of Color. Specifically, scholars point to the importance of critical professional development, teacher-led networks, and educator inquiry spaces to break from the alienation and isolation faced by educators of color and critical

educators towards the development of critical consciousness, pedagogical practices, activism, and solidarity (Baker-Doyle, 2017; Catone, 2017; Kohli, Picower, Martinez, & Ortiz, 2015; Martinez, Valdez, & Cariaga, 2016; Navarro, 2018; Pour-Khorshid, 2018; Richie & Wilson, 2000; Rogers, Kramer, and Mosley, 2009; Valdez et al, 2018). Many of these collectives, particularly those that prioritize educators of color, aim to foster fugitive spaces of liberation and transformation by continuing the legacy of Black feminist scholarship founded in self-care, healing, joy, and love (Collins, 2002; Dillard, 2000; Gumbs, 2016; hooks, 1989; Maree-brown, 2017). While the majority of these scholars do not directly frame their work as teacher leadership, they provide important implications for leadership by promoting the agency, cultural wealth, and resilience of critical educators of color. However, these powerful critical collectives are housed outside of school systems (for good reason) and depend on the individuals to create leadership roles and opportunities for themselves. As Kohli et al. (2019) suggest this creates an additional burden and responsibility on educators of color beyond their overwhelming profession (Gorski & Chen, 2015). We have yet to consider how and if these kinds of leadership and learning spaces can be collectively cultivated within school systems. Further, more research is required to examine how educators of color are enacting leadership by impacting and influencing policies and practices within schools and districts towards a more robust understanding of racial-equity focused educator leadership.

Teacher Unions as Organizational Leadership for Equity

Given the limited research on the intersection of teacher leadership and racial equity, teachers of color could be powerful sources of justice-focused leadership, particularly if there are clear pathways and opportunities to lead. While the previously discussed literature often provides implications for teacher preparation programs and district-driven professional development,

teachers unions, as organizations with a formal role in the professional lives of teachers, hold promise as spaces to develop and support the critical leadership of educators across schools and within the system (Bascia, 2000).

However, teachers unions are largely absent from the literature on leadership[5]. Aside from the cursory recognition that participation as a union representative is a common and formalized leadership position for educators (Berry, Daughtrey, & Weider, 2010; Leithwood, 2003; Silva, Gimbert, & Nolan, 2000; Smylie & Denny, 1990; York & Barr, 20015), teachers unions are not substantively addressed in the teacher leadership scholarship. A notable exception is Bascia (1997), who refers to teacher leaders within their unions in the U.S. and Canada as "invisible leadership." She contends union involvement offers teachers, "opportunities to participate in curricular and organizational development activities as well as access to decision-making, information, and resources - arguably the broadest range of activities and benefits of any teacher leadership role and a foundation for other teacher leadership work" (p. 70). In addition, she highlights some of the constraints of union-related leadership work including the additional responsibilities, tensions with administrators, and lack of recognition. Importantly, Bascia (1997) positions teachers unions as a place where teacher leaders can build relationships with other educators beyond their schools to "create and sustain professional communities across time and space" (p. 76). The importance of creating networks, communities, and systems of support for educators mirrors the call from the teacher leadership and teacher of color literature, and Bascia (in this piece and future scholarship) advocates that unions can play that role.

[5] There are historic accounts of heroic union leaders such as American Federation of Teachers rabble-rouser Albert Shanker (Khalenberg, 2007) or Nation Education Association feminist activist Margaret Haley (Rousmaniere, 2005).

Another exception is Bangs & MacBeath (2012) who refer to the work of teachers unions as collective leadership to understand the relationship between teachers unions and governments. While they take a global perspective, they do highlight the work of the NEA and AFT as teacher organizations leading professional development and teacher learning in ways that other countries are emulating as models. They argue that teachers unions are well positioned to take up the task of leadership. As they describe,

> teacher unions have unprecedented opportunities to share in the task of leadership, to spread the burdens and rewards of reciprocal accountability, to take the lead in influencing the nature of the provision of their own learning and their influence in the creation of teacher policy (Bangs & MacBeath, 2002, p. 340).

Of particular note, is the way these authors position educator collective agency and knowledge as the strength of unions and their leadership.

Finally, Johnson et al. (2009) explore the perspectives and experiences of teacher union presidents. Specifically they found these union presidents exercised significant autonomy from state and national union affiliates to determine their own bargaining agenda and priorities. Overall, these leaders had broad reform agendas beyond traditional industrial union concerns and had forged more collaborative labor-management relationships. These authors acknowledge that this was the first major study of union presidents and intended to be a foundation for future research. Johnson et al. (2009) describe it as a "critically important, but largely understudied, area of education policy" (p. 378).

Taken together, these few studies put forth important propositions of the role teachers unions can and perhaps should play in education leadership, yet researchers have not adequately taken up the charge to fully conceptualize unions as sites of organizational leadership. However, waves of reform within teachers unions and empirical inquiry into the role of unions in education policy and practice do suggest that unions are exerting power and influence in schools and

districts, creating an opportunity to explicitly position and study them as sources of leadership. Further, a movement towards social justice unionism and race-conscious initiatives opens new possibilities for unions to shape and lead racial justice transformation.

The changing landscape of Teachers Unions

Teachers unions have been around for over 100 years with the founding of the National Education Association (NEA) in 1857 and the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) in 1919[6] to improve the rights and working conditions of teachers. As part of a broader organized labor movement, teachers unions have historically been spaces of educator collective agency and activism, through advancing issues of teacher wellbeing and justice, such as expanding the rights of women fighting for equal pay, protecting progressive educators from anti-communist attacks, and demonstrating against the bureaucratic and dehumanizing, "factory model" of schooling in urban centers (Foster, 1997; Levine, 2002; Murphy, 1990; Perlstein, 1999; Bascia, 2015; Urban, 1989). However, they moved from marginal activists in select cities to become a force with significant institutional power and influence after achieving the ability to collectively bargain in the 1960s. The passage of collective bargaining, meaning the negotiation of a labor-management contract that stipulates the terms of employment and conditions, allowed for teachers themselves to shape their own work and provided resources to advocate at the local and national level, rapidly expanding their membership base and building political power (Goldstein, 2015; Kahlenberg, 2006; Murphy, 1990; Saltzman, 1985).

[6] I use the term teachers unions to discuss both the AFT and the NEA. While these two unions have a deep history that stems from different roots and traditions that shape the context of their work (see Murphy, 1990) these unions have become increasingly similar in their policies and practices over the past few decades, including a formal partnership between the two unions ((http://www.nea.org/home/11204.htm) and several states and districts merging their associations (Bascia & Stevenson, 2017; Cameron, 2005; Sawchuk, 2013).

As an organization that represents the collective interests of educators, teachers unions are key stakeholders in the current education landscape. At present, the NEA and AFT combined have affiliates in every state and represent over 3 million educators (NEA, 2017; AFT, 2017). In particular, teachers unions hold considerable power in shaping education policy and practices through local decision-making structures, such as school boards, as well as substantial lobbying strength at the state and national level (Kahlenberg, 2006; Moe, 2006; Strunk & Grissom, 2010). Further, through collective bargaining agreements, legally binding contracts negotiated between a union and district, teachers unions are instrumental in governing school district policy and are consequential to the implementation of reforms and effectiveness of schools (Eberts, 2007; Hill, 2006; Poole, 2000; Strunk, 2012; 2014)

However, not every state allows collective bargaining for public sector unions and our current era of increased accountability, neoliberal policies, and market-based education reforms have negatively impacted unions. For example, we have seen a proliferation of charter schools with largely non-unionized employees and initiatives that incentivize districts to adopt policies that lessen the influence of unions in district policy-making (Bascia, 2015; Compton & Weiner, 2008; Krisbergh, 2005; Mariannno, 2015; Malin, 2012; Strunk & Grissom, 2010; Superfine & Gottlieb, 2014; Young, 2017). In addition, a rise in politically conservative "right to work" legislation at the state level and now the monumental 2018 supreme court decision in Janus vs. American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees (AFSCME), determined that public-sector unions can no longer collect "agency fees" or "fair share" fees from non-members to cover the cost of collective bargaining, a decision considered to be a significant blow to organized labor that has caused great uncertainty about their future (Baron, 2018; Finger &

Hartney, 2019; Hertel-Fernandez, 2018; Marianno & Strunk, 2018; Semuels, 2018; Strassfeld & Strassfeld, 2020; Workman, 2011).

Consequently, teachers unions are not equally powerful across every context, in fact a national report by the Fordham Foundation acknowledged that the direct influence of teachers unions is highly varied across states and districts, however, they concluded that their power and potential cannot be ignored (Winkler, Scull, & Zeehandelaar, 2012). Instead, the more fundamental question facing teachers unions is, as former AFT union leaders Bob Peterson and Michael Charney once asked, "how they will use their power?" (Peterson & Charney, 1999, p. 6).

Expanding the role of Teachers Unions

The 1980's and 1990's were a critical time for teachers unions in that they greatly expanded their role in education policy and practice. In response to a more conservative political climate, the election of President Reagan, and the infamous *Nation at Risk Report (1983*), professionalizing teaching became a national focus that brought about new standards and expectations through the Carnegie (1986) report "*A nation prepared: Teachers for the 21st century"* as well as the creation of the National Board of Professional Teaching Standards (Urbanski & Nickolaou, 1997). Specifically, this era was defined by increased opportunities for teacher leaders to advance their profession and have greater influence in teaching and learning (Fullan, 1993; Hargreaves & Evans, 1997; Koppich, 1991; Lieberman, 1988; Smylie & Denny, 1990; Urbanski & Nickoulou, 1997). Teachers unions, in particular, played an essential role in the teacher professionalization movement as they began re-defining the labor-management relationships with districts and broadening the scope of collective bargaining beyond the "bread and butter" issues of teacher pay and working conditions (Koppich, 1991; McDonnell & Pascal,

1988; Urbanski & Nickolaou, 1997). Largely championed by renowned union activist and AFT president, Albert (Al) Shanker, unions saw the need to respond to the critique of the failure of public schools by shifting their practice from more industrial forms of unionization to a reform oriented unionism, or professional unionism (Kahlenberg, 2007). During the next decade, Al Shanker gave several speeches on the need for a new unionism that would improve the status of teachers and preserve public education (Kahlenberg, 2007). Shanker advocated for many highly contested reforms such as merit pay for teachers, creating national quality standards, and accountability mechanisms such as peer review, that the NEA staunchly opposed. These actions spurred a movement to become "a union of professionals" that changed what unions can and should do (Kerchner & Koppich, 1993). By the end of the 1990s the NEA joined the AFT in the new unionism, embracing systems like peer review, in order to put school and teaching quality at the center of collective bargaining. As NEA president Bob Chase proclaimed, "We must revitalize our public schools from within, or they will be dismantled from without" (as cited in Kahlenberg, 2007, p. 373).

During this time teacher leadership became synonymous with professionalization and unions, largely through their collective bargaining agreements, became strong advocates for the profession (McDonnell & Pascal, 1988; Urbanski & Nickolaou, 1997). Reform unionism brought conversations of teaching quality, including the improvement of instruction and curriculum, into the realm of union work. Collective bargaining agreements included policies around class size, evaluation, budgeting, site-based decision-making, staffing, and professional development, making unions central to "district efforts to restructure the education system" (Koppich, 1991, p. x). It acknowledged that educators have a role to play in school reform efforts and share a responsibility in improving education for all students. Reform unionism prioritized teacher

expertise and positioned teachers, as the closest to practice, as the ideal leaders and decision makers in this work. Lastly, reform unionism encouraged labor-management collaboration and interest-based or "win-win" bargaining, transforming traditional adversarial relationships between educators and administrators into more professional relations focused on the joint work of improving teaching and learning (Johnson & Kardos, 2000; Kerchner & Koppich, 1993; Kerchner, Koppich, & Weeres, 1997; Koppich, 1991; Peterson, 1999).

While the professional-focused reform unionism has been taken up to varying degrees in local unions across the country, and is impacted by the ability to collectively bargain, these ideas and strategies have proliferated. For example, there is evidence of unions across the country collaborating with districts to improve education outcomes from students through career ladder and mentorship programs, joint-evaluation processes such as peer assistance review, and structures for shared decision-making (Bascia & Osmund, 2012; Goldstein, 2010; Green & Etheridge, 2001; Hamil, 2011; Humphrey et al., 2011; Johnson et al, 2007; Katz, 2015; Knudson et al., 2017; Koppich, 2005; Peterson & Charney, 1999; Pogodziński, Umpstead, & Witt, 2015; Rice, 2007; Rubenstein & McCarthy, 2016; Sanzone, 2020; Solomon, 2009; Sullivan, 2012). Teachers unions have also assumed responsibility for teacher quality through initiating professional development and leadership programs (American Federation of Teachers, n.d.; Bangs & MacBeath, 2012; Bascia, 2000; 2008; Bascia & Osmond, 2012; National Education Association, 2021; United Federation of Teachers, 2021; Will, 2019). Another indicator of the impact of the reform unionism movement is the creation of the Teachers Union Reform Network (TURN), a nationwide coalition of over 200 affiliates from the NEA and AFT that seek to "improve the quality of teaching" and "expand the scope of collective bargaining to include instructional and professional issues" (Shirley, 2016; Koppich, 2005; Miner, 1999; Urbanski &

Erskine, 2000; TURN, 2017). This union-led effort of like-minded locals organized themselves in regional communities of practice to share resources, knowledge, challenges, and success in order to empower teachers to drive improvements in teaching and learning, encourage collaboration between labor and management to improve schools, and restructure unions to support better learning and student achievement (TURN, 2017). These reform unionism ideas of education policy and practice are being negotiated in collective bargaining agreements (Cohen-Vogel & Osborne-Lampkin, 2007; Cowen & Strunk; 2015; Strunk & Grissom, 2010; Vachon & Ma, 2015) and both unions and districts have been encouraged to adopt interest-based and collaborative labor-management relations (Eckert et al., 2011; Katz, 2015; Klinger, 2003; U.S. Department of Education, 2012). It is precisely the fact that unions are deeply embedded in and influencing the politics and processes of education reform that makes them so divisive (Bascia & Osmund, 2012; Goldstein, 2011; Hess & Kelly, 2006; Hill, 2006; Johnson, 2004; Manna, 2006; Moe, 2011; Young, 2017).

Thus, this study builds from the knowledge about how unions are shaping initiatives through their agency and/or resistance by positing union activity as a form of education leadership, though unions are rarely framed as such. In a recent review, Osborne-Lampkin, Cohen-Vogel, Feng, and Wilson (2018) found that the scholarship on teachers unions was not grounded in theory as studies overwhelmingly did not employ conceptual frameworks. If they did, they concentrated on economic or political science frames using quantitative methods towards the impacts of collective bargaining on student outcomes (Osborne-Lampkin, Cohen-Vogel, Feng, & Wilson, 2018). Consequently, there is much room to engage in research on teachers unions beyond quantitative outcomes or debates on their value (Fowles & Cowen, 2015; Kerchner & Koppich, 2000; Marianno, 2021; Osborne-Lampkin et al., 2018). The existing

research highlights the important role of unions in education reform and we have evidence that unions are in fact reforming themselves. Thus, I echo the call for more scholarship that conceptualizes and engages unions as critical sources of education leadership (Bascia, 1997; Johnson, 2009).

Openings towards Equity

While the reform unionism literature does offer insights for teacher leadership and helped establish unions as key stakeholders and influencers of education policies and practices, it is not explicit about issues of equity. Overall, the language remains focused on teacher quality, educator working conditions, and improving outcomes for all students. To that end, recent shifts in union priorities across the country, such as the rise of social justice unionism, have created new opportunities in unions to address issues of equity and justice, thus shaping what unions are leading towards.

Social Justice Unionism

Social justice unionism[7] is a deliberate attempt to continue the expansion of the role of teacher unions to include larger issues of justice, democracy, and preserving public education. Originally articulated following a national conference of union activists in 1994, social justice unionism should: defend member rights, address the needs of the broader community, recognize parents and community as key allies, build alliances with other labor and community based organizations, and fully involve rank-and-file members in the running of the union (Peterson & Charney, 1999). This movement seeks to expand the notion of teacher workplace to include

[7] Scholars such as Lois Weiner use the term "social movement unionism" but she operationalizes the term similar to the definition of social justice unionism. There is some debate about whether these terms are interchangeable. For example, Turner & Hurd (2001) discuss social movement unionism as a trend within organized labor more broadly to engage rank-and-file members in the organization that has contributed to the revitalization of labor unions within the U.S. Scipes (2014) argues that there is theoretical confusion between the two terms and that social movement unionism should not be used to describe labor organizing in the U.S. due to the fundamentally different nature of trade organizing in the rest of the world where the term originated.

collaboration with communities and shift the role of teachers unions beyond immediate economic and contractual concerns to larger issues of social justice and education equity (Bascia, 2015; Rottmann, 2012; Weiner, 2012). As Weiner (2012) states, "The union functions as connective tissue, linking struggles for a just, equitable society – and world – to teachers' concerns about schools and education" (p. 43).

In recent years we have witnessed this brand of unionism take center-stage as teachers unions across the country took up more industrial and "militant" tactics by going on strike to protest the neoliberal takeover of schools including chronic underfunding of public education and increased privatization (Anderson, 2020; Ashby & Bruno, 2016; Henig & Lyon, 2019; Jacoby & Nitta, 2012; Strassfeld & Strassfeld, 2020). We saw the hashtag Red4Ed dominate the media as even teachers unions in southern republican controlled states, without the legal ability to collectively bargain, took to the streets against unequal wealth distribution, proliferation of charter schools, and voucher programs (Blanc, 2019; Johnson, 2017). Broadening the union agenda to fight for public education and the "schools students deserve" (Charney, Hagopian, and Peterson, 2021) helped create coalitions and support from families and communities towards both the betterment of schools and, particularly in this post-*Janus* political climate, the preservation of unions (Brogan, 2014; Hodges, 2021; Strassfeld & Strassfeld, 2020).

While the strikes represent one facet of social justice unionism, another critical element has been the work of teachers unions to transform themselves from within. Perhaps the most prominent example of this is from the Chicago Teachers Union and their Caucus of Rank-and-File Educators (CORE). CORE began as a group of 8 educators within the Chicago Teachers Union who were frustrated with the union's official position or lack of position against the Mayor's "Renaissance 2010" education plan that would close 1/3 of Chicago public schools in

favor of privately run charter schools (Alter, 2013). The “militant minority” grew within the union, engaging in book studies, attending school closure hearings, and organizing inside the CTU, to become CORE in 2008. CORE is frequently cited as the great success story of social justice unionism because this caucus of teachers was able to push their radical agenda, from the bottom-up, to eventually win union formal leadership positions and were instrumental in the 2012 teacher strikes in Chicago that had strong community support and served as a model of union-community collaboration for equity (Ashby & Bruno, 2016; Catone, 2013; Shelton, 2018; Uetricht, 2014; Weiner, 2012). At least 20 other major unions now have a radical caucus similar to CORE such as the Movement of Rank and File Educators (MORE) in New York City, Social Equality Educators (SEE) in Seattle, and the caucus of Working Educators (WE) in Philadelphia and have formed a national network called UCORE to share their experiences and resources (Anyon, 2014; Gunderson, 2015; Maton, 2016; Riley, 2021; Shiller, 2020; Stark, 2019; Weiner, 2012). The scholarship on these caucuses has largely focused on their book study groups to build the political education (Alinsky, 1971; Horton & Friere, 1990) of their union membership towards social change, a practice that was instrumental in Chicago (Ashby & Bruno, 2016; Bradbury et al., 2014; Maton, 2016; Maton, 2018; Riley, 2021, Stark, 2019).

Importantly, a burgeoning body of literature is beginning to address a shift in these caucuses towards more explicit attention to issues of racial equity, particularly following the rise of #BlackLivesMatter. For example, Riley (2021) and Maton (2016, 2018) document the movement within WE (Philadelphia) away from original neoliberal concerns to racial justice concerns such as caucus members joining working groups towards anti-racism and immigration justice, and their participation in the Black Lives Matter week of action, an initiative started by SEE in Seattle that spread across the country (Au & Hagopian, 2021; BLM at school, 2021).

Maton (2016) also highlights internal tensions of caucus members discussing the lack of racial diversity of WE collective, in Philadelphia, and the embedded whiteness (Harris, 1993) that may be preventing more teachers of color from participating, a concern that was echoed in the Baltimore caucus (Shiller & Caucus, 2020). The whiteness of the WE caucus also caused concerns for how to authentically communicate and partner with communities of color (Maton, 2016). In addition, Shiller & Caucus (2020) documents the work of BMORE in Baltimore to put racial equity at the center of teacher organizing by prioritizing Black leadership within the caucus and intentionally deepening relationships within their small group of mostly educators of color as opposed to expanding their membership. As Shiller & Caucus (2020) explains,

> We recognized that the work was slow. If we just got everybody involved in BMORE—without considering that the people most likely to join up would be those with the most resources, time, and lack of discrimination on the worksite—we knew that we would likely attract a high number of liberal white teachers. Over time, this new membership could create a white space that was no longer safe for educators of color to join and speak out. We were and are very conscious of staying true to our original goal for Black leadership. After all, we are in a Black city. (para. 20)

BMORE's efforts resulted in a successful campaign to elect Black women into formal union leadership. However, the work of WE and BMORE raises questions about the ways whiteness may undermine the good intentions of union caucuses, even when they name racial equity as a central concern.

However, it is important to note that there are few examples in the literature of teachers unions explicitly centering racial equity as the driver of change as opposed to a potential outcome of a broader initiative. While unions construct the proliferation of charter schools, vouchers, and privatization as issues of racial equity because they disproportionately impact students of color (Magness & Surprenant, 2019; Picower & Mayorga, 2015; Sondel et al., 2019; Vasquez Heilig et al., 2019), these types of initiatives represent alignment with the existing

goals of teachers unions rather than addressing the racist and colonial fabric of schooling towards the leadership, agency, and self-determination of people of color (Brayboy et al., 2007; Ladson-Billings, 2006; Smith, 2013). When unions do take up racial equity focused initiatives towards addressing institutional racism, such as implementing restorative justice programs, investing in counselors and removing cops from schools, or teaching ethnic studies curriculum, it is often in a slate of issues as part of a broader platform, rather than the central focus.

In general, the umbrella of social justice unionism encompasses a wide variety of efforts from increased member organizing and engagement, to building political education, to city-wide coalitions against gentrification. And while the literature uses terms like social justice, change, and common good, these terms remain vague and rarely defined (Gautreaux, 2019). Without explicit attention to racial equity, there is a risk of co-optation towards race-evasive, traditional union (white) interests (Bell, 1980) of defending public education and preserving unions.

Tensions of Racial Equity and Teacher Interests

While the language of social justice unionism is more recent, the idea of teachers unions being places of agency and activism towards issues of equity is not (Weiner, 2012). Teachers unions have been part of struggles for justice since their inception including efforts for discrimination protection from male administrators, equal pay for women, and the reversal of laws banning married women from teaching, as well as promoting academic freedom and movements for civil rights and feminism (Rottman et al, 2015; Murphy, 1990; Rousmaniere, 2005). For example, Johnson (2002) chronicles the work of The Teachers Union of New York City who joined together with scholars, labor organizers, and community members to address issues of racial and ethnic prejudice during the 1930s and 1940s. Specifically, Johnson provides two cases in the majority Black neighborhoods of Harlem and Bedford-Stuyvesant where the

union implemented Black History curriculum, provided diversity resources and trainings for teachers, conducted reports on the state of race relations, advocated for hiring more African American teachers, and called for the removal of racist and anti-Semitic teachers from the classroom.

More recently, there are examples of state associations and local unions applying practices of social justice unionism at an institutional level, particularly in building coalitions with communities toward common goals. For example, Fabricant (2010) discusses the community-led education organizing group, Community Collaborative to Improve District 9 (CC9), and their process of collaboration with the United Federation of Teachers (UFT) and other stakeholders, to improve education in the South Bronx. In particular, the UFT as part of CC9 worked to launch a "lead teacher campaign" where experienced teachers would be given the resources and job title of "lead teacher" in order to mentor and support novice teachers in the cities failing schools. CC9 was successful in instituting 36 "lead teachers" in ten underperforming schools in the Bronx, a practice that a couple years later was adopted more broadly by the New York City Department of Education. In other cities, such as St. Paul, Minnesota, the Saint Paul Federation of Teachers has expanded their contract negotiation process to not only include community interests but also invite parents and community members to participate at the bargaining table (Ricker, 2015). In addition, several states and districts, in collaboration with their unions, have implemented "grow your own" programs to recruit and retain teachers of color, particularly from underserved communities (Alvarez, 2017; Mediratta, Shah, McAlister, 2009; Shirley, 2016; Skinner, Garreton, & Schutlz, 2011). These initiatives work to engage with nondominant communities, broaden the scope of bargaining, and increase participation in union decision-making in education policy and practice towards issues of equity.

However, teachers unions history has also been complicated, with scholarship acknowledging efforts to advance and also oppose reforms for racial justice. For example, during the civil rights era the AFT took a militant stance in favor of integration with strong alliances with the NAACP and active participation in protests and demonstrations, however, resolutions within the AFT against Jim Crow laws were defeated by Southern states (Dewing, 1973; Murphy, 1990). The NEA made a historic move to join with the American Teacher Association, the largest Black teacher organization, but was less vocal around issues of integration and still maintained some segregated associations well after the Brown vs. Board decision[8] (Murphy, 1990). Perhaps the most documented case of racial conflict in regards to the work of teachers unions is the 1967-1968 controversy over community control in the Ocean Hill-Brownsville neighborhood of New York City, a conflict that pitted the majority white teachers union against the Black residents of the school community in a battle for the city schools (Goldstein, 2015; Gordon, 2001; Kahlenberg, 2007; Murphy, 1990; Perrillo, 2012; Podair, 2002). Specifically, the Black community wanted a teaching staff reflective of their students, however, hiring and staffing practices were under the purview of the teachers union. The community's desire for more agency and control in the education of their children was at odds with the United Federation of Teachers (UFT) interests (and particularly union leader Al Shanker) to maintain education "professionalism" and their rights as educators to keep staffing procedures uniform across the district.

Even though teacher unions in New York City had been on the front lines of racial justice activism in the decades before the Ocean Hill-Brownsville conflict, a shift in union organization

[8] It is important to acknowledge that integration is not synonymous with racial equity as integration and the Brown v. Board decision had harmful effects for Black students, Black teachers, and Black communities (Ladson-Billings, 2004; Milner & Howard, 2004; Tillman, 2004).

and priorities created a schism between educators and the communities they served. As Dennis Shirley (2016) contends,

> Teacher unions in the U.S. were reinventing themselves, shifting from their more militant and activist working-class origins toward a more professionalized middle-class identity. This historical transition was accompanied by an ideology of color-blindness among the mass members of the UFT that failed to acknowledge the complexity of racial formation in the U.S. and left them largely incapable of apprehending the depth of community grievances among African Americans. The more that the UFT's arguments for professional rights were advanced, the more the Black community drew back in mistrust. (p. 47)

The conflict led to one of the largest teacher strikes in U.S. history and is still cited for leaving a legacy of distrust between unions and communities of color (Perlstein, 1999; Perrillo, 2012, Peterson, 1999; Podair, 2002). Peterson (1999) acknowledges that "teacher-union relations with communities of color have been particularly affected by an approach that prioritizes the interest and rights of teachers above the concerns of students and communities" (p. 18).

Similar tensions erupted between Padres y Jovenes Unidos (PJU), a group of families in Denver Public Schools, and the Denver Classroom Teachers Association. Frustrated by failing schools and slow progress, PJU advocated for a comprehensive redesign of a local high school that included the provision that teachers would have to reapply for their jobs (Mira, Nikundiwe, & Wadhwa, 2011). A community's interest in maintaining a teaching force that held high expectations for students of color conflicted with the rights and procedures of unionized teachers and again, resulted in animosity and discord (Mira, Nikundiwe, & Wadhwa, 2011; Shirley, 2016).

In sum, these examples illuminate the tensions in advancing issues of racial justice, particularly when those equity concerns impinge upon educator contractual rights and union interests. Further, the accounts of racialized dynamics are often between the union and the broader community, meaning white teachers versus parents and community members of color.

How might these dynamics, relationships, and initiatives change if it were teachers of color, centering their collective histories and lived experiences, leading in these spaces? Importantly, the reform unionism literature that touts the benefits of labor-management (union-district) collaboration, makes no mention of race, thus reifying whiteness as the norm. While the teaching force is overwhelmingly white teachers, and preparation programs and schools uphold whiteness (Brown, 2014; Sleeter, 2001), the omission of race in union literature similarly perpetuates unions as solely white spaces thus erasing and invisibilizing the teachers of color who are active in their schools and districts in issues towards equity (Kohli et al., 2021). Further, teachers unions are diverse organizations that encompass a wide range of political positions and commitments. Even within their progressive fractions, they may still disagree on goals and strategies towards transformation. For example, Gautreaux's (2019) dissertation highlights the tension felt by educators within the Chicago Teachers Union (CTU) and their leadership's alignment with the Movement for Black Lives (M4BL). While demands such as halting charter schools and removing cops from schools had broader support, some educators were conflicted about the M4BL's condemnation of all police and particularly police unions. Specifically, some felt this was a matter of individual "bad cops" needing reform and others felt the need to show "union to union solidarity" (Gautreaux, 2019). Taken together, the work of racial equity is far more complex than strategic policy "wins" and alliances; thus, while the social justice unionism literature highlights promising possibilities, more work needs to unpack the nuances and racialized dynamics within and between unions, districts, and communities towards justice-centered transformation.

The road ahead

We are in a time where some local and state-level teachers unions and both national unions (AFT & NEA) are making public commitments to dismantle white supremacy and fight for racial equity. Educators, through their unions, are building coalitions, sharing strategies, and documenting their work towards justice. However, exceedingly little empirical inquiry into these efforts exist. Given that previous literature highlights the agency and activism of teachers unions as well as their political power and influence in education policy and decision-making, there is a critical imperative to conceptualize and examine unions as legitimate sources of education leadership with the power to shape and lead racial equity. Specifically, this work should prioritize the knowledge, practices, and collective leadership of educators of color as they grapple with the tensions, complexities, and possibilities of racial equity-focused systemic transformation.

Chapter 2: Framework and Methods

Examining Leadership as a Learning Process

Over the past several decades, scholars of district-based reform and systemic instructional improvement have argued for the need to consider learning in our understanding and analysis of organizational leadership and change (see Cohen 1982; Elmore 1983; Hubbard et al., 2006; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2006). Given the complexity and ambiguity of leading systems change, with competing reform agendas, conflicting theories of action, and challenges of capacity, scholars have looked to theories of learning to consider, "not only individual learning of new skills but also a collective learning challenge: the organization itself needs to 'learn' new ways of working, coping with the uncertainties, and managing the tensions that ambitious reform entails" (Knapp, 2008, p. 524). In particular, this line of inquiry primarily employs theories of organizational learning (e.g. Levitt & March, 1988) to re-frame reform efforts from a problem of implementation or alignment, to a problem of learning, as well as to explore schools and districts as "learning systems" or "learning organizations" (Honig, 2008).

However, some scholars have noted the limits of these theories of organizational learning, built on cognitive and behaviorist assumptions of learning, that prioritize the sense-making and actions of individuals (Gallucci, 2008; Herrenkohl, 2008; Honig, 2008; Ishimaru & Galloway, 2014; Knapp, 2008; Ogawa, Crain, Loomis & Ball, 2008). Instead these scholars have sought to bridge disciplinary divides to incorporate other theories of human learning and development, such as sociocultural learning theories. Sociocultural learning theories assume all learning is a social process, within activity settings or communities, and deeply situated in context (Engeström, 1999; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Rogoff et al, 1995). These theories are particularly useful when considering organizational leadership as they shift our focus from individual thoughts and actions to a collective and social process of learning.

This connection between leadership and learning becomes even more consequential in considerations of racial equity and education justice. Developing collective leadership and building capacity to disrupt and remedy inequities hinge on the notion that educators will need to not only think differently, but also act differently (Ishimaru & Galloway, 2020). Often this is taking up new work, relationships, and practices towards equity that again implicates a process of learning in order for educators, as adults and practitioners, to build their individual and collective capacity to enact justice-oriented change (Bensimon & Malcom, 2012; Copland & Knapp, 2006; Darling-Hammond & Sykes, 1999; Lewis & Diamond, 2015; Harris & Bensimon, 2007; Ishimaru & Galloway, 2014; Scanlan, 2013; Spillane, 2005). As such, I understand the *enactment of leadership for equity as a learning process* and employ a learning theory lens to examine the collective leadership activity of the Center for Racial Equity Coaches. Specifically, I use the lens of cultural-historical activity theory (CHAT), a sociocultural learning theory, and core concepts of boundaries and politicized trust to explore how leadership towards racial equity is developed and enacted within and beyond a teachers union.

CHAT as a lens to understand collective leadership activity

Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) attends to the collaborative learning and experiences of individuals engaged in complex social systems, such as education. Drawing from Marxist social psychology and developed by Vygotsky (1978) and further elaborated on by Leont'ev (1974) and Engeström (1987), CHAT asserts that all learning is social and is shaped by culture and history. CHAT uses the language of "activity" or "activity systems" as a way to bound and analyze how learning occurs through the mutually reinforcing relationship of social interactions and the environment. Thus, object (or goal) focused activity becomes the unit of analysis. As such, I use CHAT as an analytic tool to foreground the collective leadership activity

of the educator leaders, or "coaches" within the Seattle Education Association's Center for Racial Equity (CRE) as they pursue racial equity initiatives though their union.

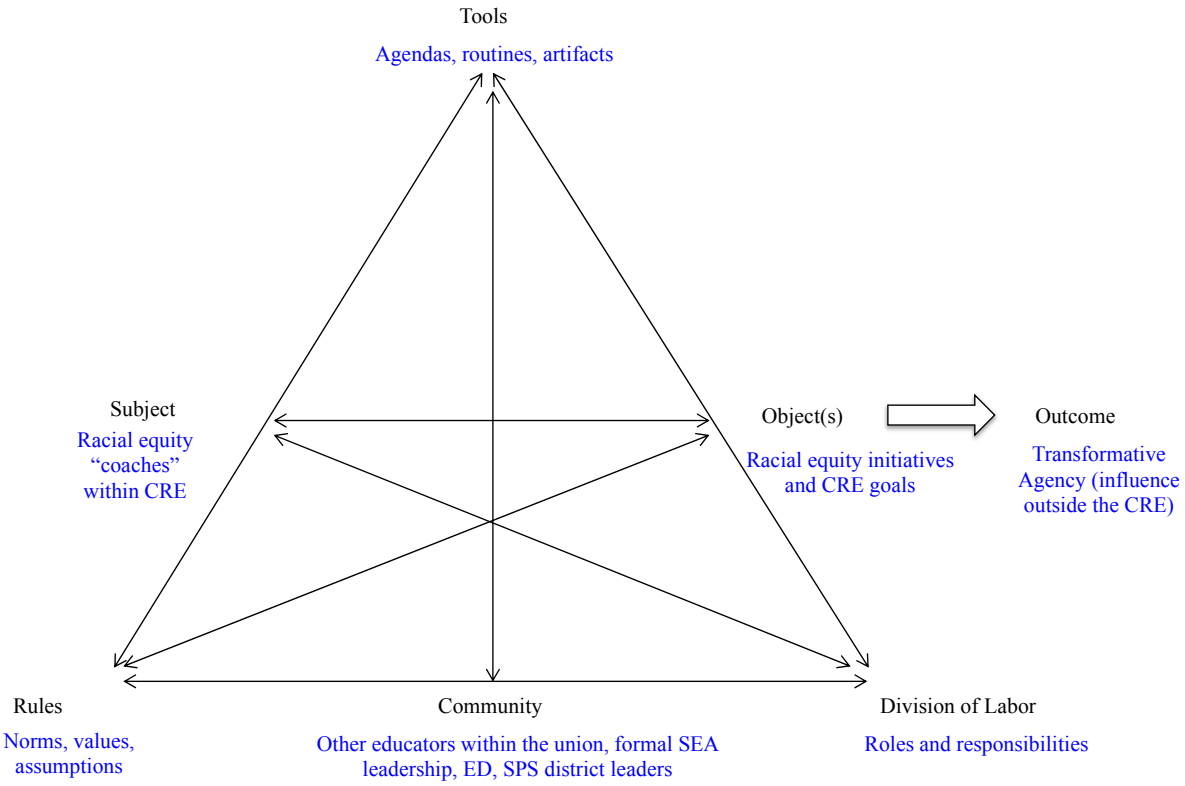

Figure 1. Center for Racial Equity (CRE) Leadership Activity System

Specifically, CHAT assumes all learning (by subjects and their broader community) is mediated by norms, assumptions, rules, division of labor, and tools as they work towards the object of activity (Foot, 2014). For example, if the CRE Coaches are collectively constructing the "object" of a new racial equity initiative, the tools (e.g. meeting agendas, training documents, workshops, website language) they develop to facilitate their leadership activity towards racial equity will be shaped by the norms/assumptions or "rules" regarding equity, division of labor that might define which educators take up what roles, and interactions educators are having within the group (subject-subject relations) or with members of the broader community (e.g. other union members, union formal leadership, district leaders). CHAT attends to how all of

these components are shaping and being shaped by the other in an evolving dynamic process (see Figure 1).

While it is impossible to "isolate" one aspect of CHAT, as each component interacts with the other, I employ CHAT to illuminate the object(s) of leadership activity within the CRE. In other words, what are the CRE coaches (educator leaders) actually doing together? What are the goals they are pursuing? How are they enacting leadership? Using the framework of CHAT allows me to keep a central focus on the goal-oriented leadership activity of the coaches and importantly, understand how that activity is formed, being shaped and mediated by other parts of the activity system, and the ways it may shift and evolve over time.

In addition, CHAT is a lens to understand "what happens" or the outcomes that occur as a result of this leadership activity. In this case, I am interested in CRE Coaches' transformative agency, defined as "breaking away from a given frame of action and taking the initiative to transform it" (Vikkunen, 2006; p. 49). Compared to other forms of agency, transformative agency is seen as the actions that collectives (as opposed to individuals) take towards creating change and is developed through their interactions over time (Haapassaari, Engeström, & Kerosuo, 2014). As such, CHAT helps make sense of the ways coaches exercise their collective agency to take leadership actions, particularly to understand if and how they shape agendas and decisions around racial equity beyond the CRE. As Engeström, Engeström, and Suntio (2002) posit, "activity theory [is], above all, a framework for understanding transformations in collective practices and organizations" (p. 211). Thus, I draw on CHAT, and the explicit attention to object-oriented activity, to elucidate the collective leadership practice of CRE coaches towards more nuanced understandings of the *what* and the *how* in change-making efforts.

Boundaries as consequential to learning

All learning involves boundaries and boundaries are critically important in both sociocultural theories and scholarship in organizational change (Akkerman & Bakker, 2011; Engeström, 2001; Engeström, Engeström, and Kärkkäinen 1995; Gutiérrez , 2008; March & Simon, 1958; Ogawa et al., 2008; Scott, 1998; Wenger, 1998). In particular, boundaries become central in "third generation" CHAT that involves the overlapping work of two or more activity systems to attend to inter-organizational learning challenges (Engeström, 2001; Roth & Lee, 2007). As Akkerman and Bakker (2011) define them, boundaries are a, "sociocultural difference leading to discontinuity in action or interaction. Boundaries simultaneously suggest a sameness and continuity in the sense that within discontinuity two or more sites are relevant to one another in a particular way" (p. 133). For example, the union (SEA) and school district (SPS) are both involved in the work of teachers and education of students in K-12 schools, giving them some continuity and relevance to each other; yet there is also discontinuity due to their differing roles and responsibilities. Thus, a clear organizational boundary exists. However, boundaries can exist without these explicit formal delineations such as between any two (or more) communities of practice or within organizations with a potentially or even partially shared object (Akkerman & Bakker, 2011; Wenger, 1998). In my context, this could include not only the institutional boundary between the union (SEA) and school district (SPS), but also the boundary between specific departments such as the ED, the Equity Department within the district, and the Center for Racial Equity (CRE), or even between the Center for Racial Equity (CRE) and the larger union (SEA). The ways these boundaries intersect with the CRE continuously shape the object(s) of their leadership activity (see figure 2).

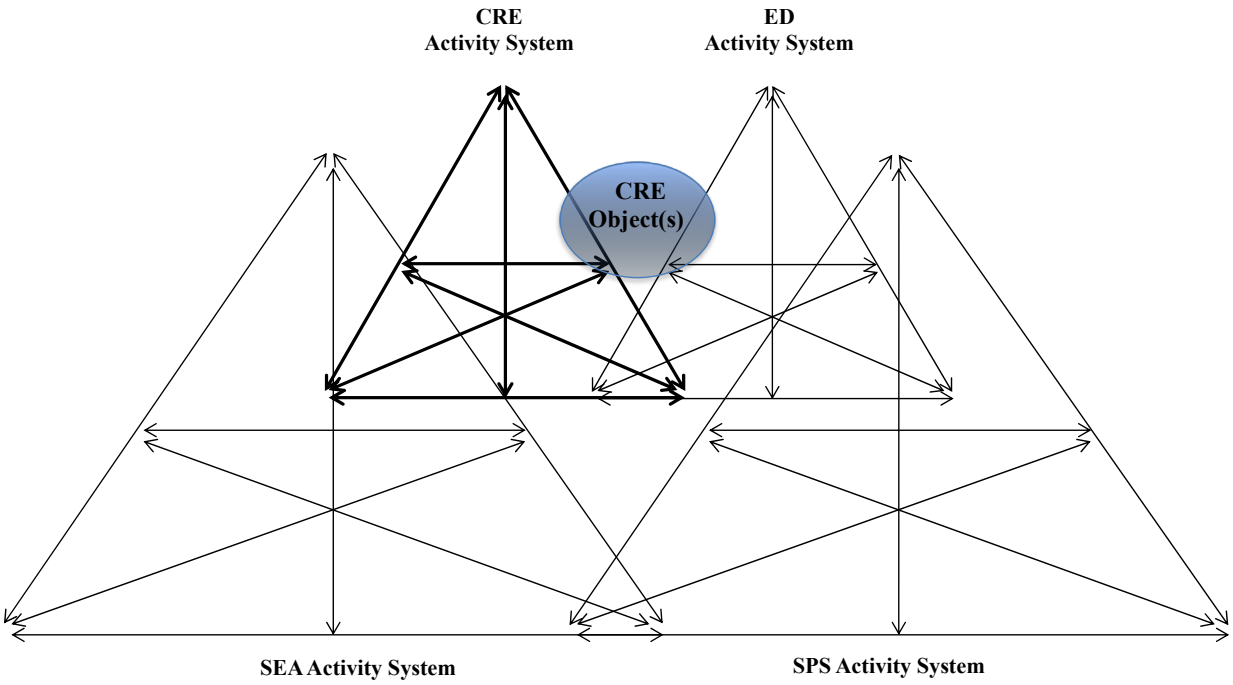

Figure 2. Overlapping activity systems (boundaries) impacting CRE object(s)

Literature on crossing these boundaries through practices (Wenger, 1998), people[9] (Edwards, Lunt, & Stamou, 2010; Engeström, Engeström, & Vähäaho, 1999), objects (Star & Griesemer, 1989), or creating a new shared activity systems called boundary-zones (Konkola, 2001), all make clear that boundaries themselves are consequential to learning and collective transformation. Specifically, boundaries are tension-filled as they may encompass competing or contradictory understandings, histories, and priorities (Engeström, 2001; Jahreie & Ottensen, 2010; Max, 2010; Waitoller, 2014). These tensions in and between activity systems become consequential to learning as individuals attempt to resolve contradictions, opening a space for new understandings, growth, and possibilities (Engeström, 2005). This is particularly salient in the context of racial equity and the complexity of justice-oriented work where folks are

[9] Also referred to in the literature as boundary spanners, boundary brokers, or boundary workers.

deliberately pushing against normative understandings and practices that reify inequities in order to disrupt the status quo (Gutiérrez & Vossoughi, 2010) or may hold divergent notions of justice (Waitoller & Artiles, 2016). This may also implicate the nature of racial inequities themselves as they are produced and reproduced across boundaries in complex systems.

In learning processes boundaries are constantly negotiated often being challenged, overcome, maintained, or even re-constructed (Akkerman, 2011; Kerosuo, 2001). While Akkerman & Bakker (2011) advocate for the fluidity of boundaries to promote learning, growth, and transformation, Waitoller and Kozleski (2013) recognize, "as the work of individuals becomes increasingly specialized and specific, boundaries become increasingly crystalized" (p. 40). For example, with a role history of what unions do (e.g. teacher labor concerns) and what districts do (e.g. education policy), these organizational boundaries may be particularly entrenched and create hierarchies of expertise. However, the case of this union-district initiative for racial equity opens new boundary space to explore how they may construct shared or partially shared objects of activity engaging in joint-work towards systemic change.

While discussion of race and racism is not inherent in traditional conceptualizations of CHAT (Bang & Vossoughi, 2016), I draw on concepts from critical scholars to remain "race conscious" in my analysis (Gutiérrez & Jaramillo, 2006; Gooden & Dantely, 2012; Khalifa, Dunbar, & Douglasb, 2013). Specifically, I add to this scholarship on boundaries the concept of racialized organizations, a theory put forth by Ray (2019) to refute the race-neutral assumptions that dominate organizational theory and builds on the structural analysis of critical race scholars (Bonilla-Silva, 1997). As Ray (2019) argues, "organizations magnify the power and depth of racial projects and are a primary terrain of racial contestation" (p. 30). Importantly, I understand both SPS and SEA to be racialized organizations, meaning that they operate within and

reconstitute racialized social systems. Thus, I extend Ray's (2019) scholarship to the work of boundaries to understand these organizational boundaries as racialized as well. Thus, the ways boundaries are constructed, disrupted, maintained, or reconstructed are inherently tied to the racialized norms, practices, logics, and goals of these racialized organizations.

While my primary focus is on the activity system of the CRE, I use the concept of racialized boundaries to understand the ways the messy, racialized, organizational and institutional boundaries may be shaping and mediating the objects of activity that the coaches pursue. I am interested in the how these boundaries may be more permeable or re-inscribed in ways that afford or constrain their leadership and transformative agency, both within and beyond the CRE.

Politicized Trust

Finally, I build on a movement of scholars who understand that hierarchies of power mediate learning itself and need explicit attention in our pursuit of equity, justice, and social transformation (Bang & Vossoughi, 2016; Gutiérrez , Engeström, & Sannino, 2016; Vakil, McKinney de Royston, Nasir, & Kirshner, 2016). I explore these powered dynamics by attending to relations and relationality (i.e. subject-subject relations), a central component of participatory design research (PDR), a methodological and conceptual innovation bringing together activity theory and design-based methodologies with critical and decolonizing methodologies (Bang & Vossoughi, 2016). As Bang & Vossoughi (2016) suggest the subject-subject relations in the making of justice projects are critically important and consequently the making of these relations can embody the espoused ideals of equity and justice. As such, subject-subject and subject-object are mutually constituted (Packer, 2010).

Similar to attending to racialized boundaries, I employ the conceptual lens of politicized trust (Vakil et al., 2016) in order to explicitly attend to the racialized (and politicized) relational dynamics in the CRE leadership activity system and the ways those relations in turn shape the object(s) of activity. As Vakil et al. (2016) argue, "human relationships are shaped by histories of race and differential power that set the stage for partnership formation" and these relationships are constantly negotiated and politicized through interaction and purposeful collective activity (p. 199). They are clear to mention that "good intentions" are not enough and that politicized trust requires the "building and cultivation of mutual trust and racial solidarity" (p. 199). In particular, Vakil and McKinney de Royston (2019), elaborate this conception of solidarity by including both political understanding (recognition of histories of racialization, oppression, and privilege) and respect (constructive dialogue, speaking truth, acknowledging multiple ways of being and knowing).

I highlight politicized trust in order to "make visible" the often-overlooked relational work in justice-driven change-making process (Bang & Vossoughi, 2016). While politicized trust has primarily been used to interrogate the role of racialized power-dynamics between researchers in university-community partnerships (Vakil et al., 2016;) and more recently student-student relationships (Vakil & McKinney de Royston, 2019). I employ this lens to examine how the CRE is building politicized trust within their collective space (educator-educator) and the ways this trust is created, maintained, or contested in the context of the power-laden district-union partnership. Specifically, politicized trust is a useful lens to better understand the interplay of race, racialization, and power in the subject-subject relations and the ways those relational dynamics are shaping the objects and outcomes of the CRE.

Taken together, I engage CHAT as a sociocultural learning theory to conceptualize leadership as a learning process by foregrounding the object-oriented or leadership activity of the CRE. I layer the concepts of racialized boundaries and politicized trust to remain "race-conscious" in my analysis and illuminate the relational and organizational dynamics towards learning, collaboration, and equity-oriented systems change.

Research Design and Methods

In line with my conceptual framework, I employed qualitative case study methodology to explore the deeply "situated" nature of leadership activity of the CRE coaches, the educator leaders of color within the union's Center for Racial Equity (Engeström, 2001). Specifically, I consider this project to be a novel case of one union's attempt at systems level racial equity leadership (Yin, 2013). Qualitative methods are appropriate for this investigation as I attended to the relational dynamics, tensions, and evolving conceptualizations of leadership as they unfolded in "real time" and over time (Glesne, 2011; Merriam, 2009). By focusing on one teachers union, I do not aim to make generalizable claims about how leadership is enacted in all unions, but instead hope to provide a robust, descriptive analysis, that contributes to theory and attends to the complexity and nuance of educator-driven systems leadership for racial equity.

Study context: Seattle Education Association and the Center for Racial Equity

Acronym	Name	Description

CBA	Collective Bargaining Agreement	Negotiated contract that governs district-union relationship
CRE	Center for Racial Equity	Equity-focused center created within the teachers union (SEA)
ED	Equity Department	Equity-focused department within the school district (SPS) and primarily collaborator with the CRE
NEA	National Education Association	Largest national teachers union, SEA is an affiliate of the NEA
RET	Racial Equity Teams	School-site based equity teams created through the district-union partnership for racial equity
SEA	Seattle Education Association	Teachers Union
SEE	Social Equality Educators	Progressive caucus of educators within SEA
SPS	Seattle Public Schools	School District
WEA	Washington Education Association	State-level teachers union, SEA is an affiliate of WEA, which is in turn an affiliate of NEA

The Seattle Education Association (SEA) represents over 5,000 educators, including certified teachers, paraprofessionals, substitutes, and staff working in the multiethnic, urban district of Seattle Public Schools (SPS). SPS is the largest district in the state enrolling over 50,000 students with 53% of students being students of color. SEA is an affiliate of the Washington Education Association (WEA), the state-level union, the National Education Association (NEA). Importantly, SEA has been around for over 50 years and is held in high regard by unions across the state, often looked to as a model of innovation and activism, particularly around issues of equity. For example, SEA has been a vocal and powerful leader in movements against standardized testing, the adoption of ethnic studies, Black Lives Matter at School, and the adoption of racial equity language and policy in the state-level union work.

Initially funded through a grant from the National Education Association, the SEA is the only teachers union in the country to have dedicated resources to create a Center for Racial Equity and have hired a director to lead equity initiatives within the union. This dedicated center

is now part of SEA bylaws, meaning it is a formal structure within the union, and can only be amended (or dismantled) through a vote by the representative assembly. I provide a fuller description and history of the Center for Racial Equity in the first findings chapter.

Importantly, my understandings of racial equity, grounded in critical and indigenous scholarship, and my own relationships in the community lead to the purposeful sampling (Patton, 2002) of SEA and specifically the work of the Center for Racial Equity. First, the innovative district-union partnership, codified in the collective bargaining agreement, provided a unique policy context and clear pathway for union influence in district-level leadership. Early on in my conceptualization of this project I read countless contracts and followed news stories of how unions were taking up issues of racial equity. I was particularly attuned to initiatives that centered racial equity, as opposed to vague social justice language, equity being an "add-on," or interest convergence (Bell, 1980) with larger issues of democracy and public education. The contract language of Racial Equity Teams (RET) and the creation of the Center for Racial Equity, with dedicated resources and investment from the membership, was an important indicator of this commitment.

Second, I sought a research space where the knowledge and expertise of people of color were prioritized. I have been engaged in and lurking around union activities for several years prior to the start of my dissertation, including a previous research project and my own activism in the Seattle strike, Black Lives Matter at School events, and participation in justice-centered community-based organizations. I joined educator listservs and chatted with various groups within the union (such as the Social Equality Educators and Bad Ass Teachers or BATS) when they presented at social justice conferences or workshops. While there was incredible equity-focused work happening in many pockets in the union, so many of these spaces were led by and

largely attended by white folks. I remember constantly wondering where all the educators of color were?! In my first informal conversation with Charise, the Director for the Center for Racial Equity, she made it clear that educators of color would be the heart of this work. She was building something special and at the time, I had no idea how special it would be, but her passion was convincing. Even just seeing Charise, a Black woman in a formal leadership position, was quite different from what I had observed in all the years prior. It was central to my study to advance the agency of people of color in racial equity leadership and the CRE made that an explicit aim.

Finally, the nature of this work is deeply political and relational. I had no interest in being a "neutral" observer (nor do I think that is possible in justice work) and it was my relationships and the fact that people kept recognizing my face, that gave me the initial access into the union. I discuss the importance of my positionality in the context of the CRE later in this chapter.

I became interested in the work of SEA after taking a school-community relations class in 2014, and noticing that SEA was part of a broader community-organizing alliance that had been active in passing the Best Starts for Kids levy, a comprehensive initiative towards the health, education, and wellbeing of children from birth-adulthood (King County, 2021). I followed the community organizing work of SEA through a qualitative methods project and interviewed SEA formal leadership. Particularly in my conversation with the union president at the time, there was a lot of skepticism and mistrust of both the University of Washington and specifically my focus in education policy, organizations, and leadership as he referred to my department as "ed reformers" whose interests were at odds with the union. While it did help that I was a union representative for the graduate student union, I give this context to say that, as someone who is not a k-12 educator and who represents the university, unions are extremely

difficult to break into. I cannot think of an example of qualitative research within a union where the researcher was not already an educator or union member. It took me several years of relationship building and consistency to get to the point of my dissertation. The information rich and novel case of district-union racial equity policy in Seattle (Patton, 2002), along with my relationships and commitments were a primary driver for my selection of SEA, and specifically the CRE.

Unit of Analysis

My central unit of analysis is the leadership activity of the educator leaders or "coaches" within the Center for Racial Equity with a particular focus on identifying the objects of their activity and how those objects evolve over time. I use concepts from third generation CHAT to consider the boundaries between multiple, overlapping activity systems, particularly the Equity Department (ED), nested within the school district (SPS). Even though educators from the CRE were collaborating with others in multiple spaces, I focused my attention on how those spaces were impacting the leadership activity within the CRE.

Study Timeframe

While I have been involved with the CRE and SEA for several years, the bulk of my formal data collection occurred in one calendar year of January, 2019 – December, 2019. Even though it was one calendar year, my study bridged two academic school years, thus providing a view of how the CRE shifted and reprioritized across multiple years of the program. In addition, there was a collective bargain that occurred during the Fall of 2019, creating its own unique dynamics that I discuss further in the findings. The following sections describe the participants, data collection methods, analysis, and limitations.

Participants

My participants were primarily the educator leaders directly engaged in the SEA Center for Racial Equity (CRE). These educators were selected by the director, Charise, through an application process to serve in this union leadership capacity, each paired with a school-based racial equity team, in addition to their teaching positions. These individuals gathered several times during the school year as Center for Racial Equity "coaches" and also participated in district trainings for educators such as the Racial Equity Team Institutes.

In addition, my data collection included individuals outside the CRE but still involved in the leadership work of the CRE. This included SEA formal leadership, members of the SPS Equity Department (ED) and other SPS district level leaders and collaborators. For example, SEA formal leadership were able to speak to the creation of the CRE and intended goals of the center. Whereas members of the ED were directly implicated in the contractually negotiated joint supervision of Racial Equity Teams. The table below summarizes the range of participants, their self-identified racial/ethnic identities and roles at the time of my study.

Name	**Racial/ethnic identity**	**Position(s)**
Flor*	Filipino-American	CRE Coach; Reading specialist
Cierra	Filipina; white	CRE Coach; ELL teacher
Taylor*	white	CRE Coach; Elementary teacher
Hana	Japanese, white	CRE Coach; Elementary teacher
Kat*	Xicanx, white	CRE Coach; Secondary teacher (Social Studies)
Lani*	Native Hawaiian, white	CRE Coach; Elementary teacher
Charise*	Black; white	CRE Director
Liz*	Thai, white	CRE Coach, Secondary teacher (Social Studies)
Rita*	Indian, white	CRE Coach; Secondary teacher (Math)
Mel	Filipino	CRE Coach; School Psychologist

Priya	Indian	CRE Coach; Secondary teacher (Math)
Serena*	Indian	CRE Coach Secondary teacher (Humanities)
Dawn	Black	CRE Coach; ELL teacher
Vincent*	Filipino	SEA Vice President; SEA President
Joan*	white	SEA President
Elena*	Latina/Mexican-American	ED Director; SPS District Leader
Ben*	white	ED Staff
Leah	Black; white	ED Staff
Nikki*	Black; Indigenous	ED Staff
Wendy	white	SPS Manager Professional Development
Marta	Xicanx	SPS Ethnic Studies Program Manager

* Interview participant

The configuration of folks in the CRE fluctuated from year to year, but there were approximately 8-12 equity coaches at any given time. Nearly all the coaches identified as women of color. While all of the coaches listed above were present at some point in my data collection, I highlight Charise and 7 of the coaches as "focal participants" as I had sustained engagement with them over the entire year-long timeframe of my study.

Importantly, the focal participants (aka badass ladies) are what grounds my study and make this work so meaningful to me. I am deeply honored that they graciously shared so much of themselves throughout my dissertation process and this study cannot fully give justice to the depth of their histories and stories. While my analysis is centered on the collective leadership practice of these educators, who they are as individuals also shape how they engage as a collective. I provide the following mini portraits to contextualize and humanize these leaders who made up the CRE, and I share a bit of the joy I experienced getting to know each of them in our time together.

Charise

Charise is the epitome of a fearless leader. She's a mixed-race Black woman, who grew up in Washington and holds strong family roots in the South. Deeply knowledgeable and confident, she will tell you exactly what is what, whether you asked her or not. I quickly learned there is never a short answer with Charise, each question bringing along with it a story, a history, a critical contextual understanding that everything is coming from somewhere. As a former elementary educator in the south end of Seattle, Charise was a connector and community builder, traits she brings with her into SEA leadership. She was chosen as the inaugural Director of the CRE because she was trusted and respected by educators and she is invested in bringing other leaders of color up with her.

Flor

Flor is small and mighty. She wears her heart on her sleeve and it is impossible not to feel her emotions bubbling at the surface each time she speaks. She is an immigrant from the Philippines and while she identifies as Filipino-American she recognizes that she is, "neither Filipino nor American. There's really only an ideological homeland for me, which is the bi-cultural homeland of all people bi-cultural" (Flor Interview, 12.2.19). Bringing a deep understanding of colonial violence and trauma, she approaches education as a holistic endeavor of healing. A "social justice educator from the get go," Flor has been an educator for over 30 years, starting from early childhood education, to classroom teaching, to now a reading specialist role. She has been in SPS for 17 years and brings her wealth immense of experience to the CRE.

Taylor

Taylor is a hoot. She's sarcastic, quick witted, and firmly believes crop tops are for everyone. She brings a sharp racial equity analysis and favors taking decisive action over chatter. She is the only white member of the CRE, "I'm a white lady, helloooo" (Taylor Interview, 11.21.19), among nearly all women of color. In her mid 30's she has been an elementary teacher focused on literacy for a decade, all at the same school, located in a historically Black neighborhood of Seattle. Taylor talks about her awakening into really "caring about racial equity" as grounded in the dynamics of her school, specifically the battle over a Montessori program that created stark racial disparities in classrooms. Her early activism and experience navigating power and privilege with the onslaught of white parents, administration, and even the school board solidified Taylor's role as a racial equity educator and leader at her school. She is seen as someone who does the work. She has served previously as a union representative for her school and is now on the board of SEA.

Kat

Kat is ready for the revolution. Or maybe she is already leading the revolution? Words come out of her at a million miles an hour, but only because she has so much energy and passion, and there is just so much work to be done. Kat is always on a path of learning and self-discovery, trying to undo the "white supremacist, capitalist, imperialist, patriarchy." She identified as a "decolonizing mixed Chicanx" to name her ongoing, never static, process of identity. In my conversations with Kat I feel her sense of searching, seeking out people and spaces to dig deep and to belong. She had recently made some big transitions, not totally by choice, from a racially diverse high school in the south end, that she had taught at for 13 years, to a predominantly white school up north. The transition brought new challenges, the same old racism, and a fire she brought with her to the CRE.

Lani

Lani is an entrepreneur with a penchant for organization and structure. She has mapped out a trajectory for her career with goals, a clear vision, and a 5-year plan. She is the youngest member of the CRE in her 2nd year as a certified elementary English Language Arts and Ethnic Studies teacher. As a biracial woman, Native Hawaiian and white, Lani talks about her entry into racial justice work being largely fueled by the racism she faced around the complexity of her own identity. Through her involvement in the CRE she joined the SEA board and was a lead organizer for racial equity policy changes at the state level Washington Education Association representative assembly. In the meantime, she also launched her own website and organization focusing on her passion of multicultural children's literature with resources and lesson plans. Lani is involved in many leadership opportunities and does a lot to keep the CRE running behind the scenes.

Liz

There is a warmth to Liz. She is tall, athletic, and soft-spoken. She checks for understanding and asks clarifying questions. Born to an immigrant Thai mother and white father, Liz grew up as an Asian American woman, on the Colville Indian Reservation. Her experiences are shaped by a complex understanding of identity, culture, and rural community. Liz has been a secondary teacher for just over 20 years, her entire career in Seattle Public Schools. It would be easy to give in to the cynicism, as she has watched equity initiatives come and go, but she remains hopeful and always does her part. While she has been involved in both school and district racial equity work in the past, she has recently become more involved with the union, also becoming a SEA board member. Liz is in it for the long-haul, with a commitment to doing right by kids, and prioritizing the health and sustainability of herself and colleagues in the CRE.

Rita

Rita is pure joy and believes that "everything is math!" She's a biracial, Indian and white, secondary math teacher with an ELL certification and giant smile on her face. She started her teaching career, nearly 10 years ago in SPS, at a small alternative school designed for new immigrant and refugee populations. Her experiences have shaped her passion for culturally affirming mathematics and dispelling Eurocentric notions of what gets seen as mathematical. Working at a small school she was often in formalized leadership positions with mentorship and professional development responsibilities that lead to opportunities in the district. She co-led the RET in her school, which became part of the first cohort of RET's when the program officially launched in the district. At the time of my study Rita had moved from being a full-time educator to being a full-time doctoral student and teacher educator at UW. She still worked as a substitute in SPS, maintaining her SEA status, and stayed committed and connected to racial equity work through her role as coach in the CRE.

Serena

Serena is a queer, second generation Indian-American, and is very cool. She's that high school teacher that students love because she just gets it without acting like she's trying so hard to get it. She has a no-nonsense, laid-back personality perfect for high school seniors. Serena is in her 5th year as a humanities and ethnic studies teacher at a school that was constantly pointed to as a model for equity work and a strong student focus. Her leadership role in her school's RET brought her, somewhat reluctantly, into the union work of CRE. As the newest CRE recruit at the time, and starting halfway through the school year, she was paired up with Rita. Rita and Serena were the only coaches not assigned to a specific school, but instead were leading a team of Education Staff Associates (i.e., school psychologists, nurses, therapists, social workers etc.) engaged in equity work across the district.

Data Collection Methods

Data collection in this study consisted of observations, interviews, and the analysis of artifacts. These methods attend to different aspects of the activity system (Engeström, 2001) and leadership practice (Spillane et al., 2004). Using multiple methods in my data collection is important to my data validity and reliability as triangulated across what participants espoused and what gets enacted in practice as I formulated my own interpretations (Glesne, 2011; Merriam, 2009). I expand on each of these data sources in the following section.

Observations

My dissertation included over 100 hours of observation. Observations served as my primary source of data collection as I was interested in understanding and capturing the "situated" nature of *how* leadership practice unfolds in the context of a teachers union (Engeström, 2005; Lofland & Lofland, 1995). This attention to practice centers the actions and behaviors of leaders as opposed to how they conceive of their leadership, recognizing that one's "espoused theory" may differ from their "theory in use" (Argyris & Schon, 1974). In other words, leadership practice is not just about what people say, but what people actually do. Thus, I attended to the relationships and dynamics between individuals and the ways the individuals interacted with their environment to shape the objects of activity.

My focus was on the leadership activity of the CRE, thus my observations centered on the collective work of the coaches. As such, the bulk of my observations took place during the CRE professional development (six-eight hours each), held at SEA union offices. Coaches typically arranged for a substitute to attend these release days that occurred on a Friday every couple of months during the academic year. In total I attended five of these professional

development days, as well as three shorter CRE meetings (two-four hours each), and the two and half day CRE overnight retreat held offsite at IslandWood on Bainbridge Island.

As the coaches' leadership activities were not entirely contained in the CRE, I also observed sites at the boundaries of the CRE that may have been shaped or influenced by the participation of coaches. For example, I observed 4 of the district sponsored Racial Equity Team Institutes (also called Saturday Institutes), a site where coaches and ED leaders provided professional development and guidance to school-based racial equity teams. These institutes, and CRE-ED collaboration for these institutes, were a part of the negotiated collective bargaining agreement in order to support the work of RETs. In particular, the CRE was intended to concentrate on induction for first year RETs while ED attended to the needs of existing and continuing teams. These Saturday Institutes became an important site to better understand the nature of the union-district collaboration and the ways the CRE was able (or unable) to exert leadership beyond the CRE.

Finally, I observed 3 RET after-school meetings as well as a couple equity-related events around Seattle that included CRE coaches. These were not primary sites of observation because my unit of analysis was not individual leaders, however, these observations did allow me to develop a fuller picture of the work of coaches and the experiences they reacted to in the collective space of the CRE.

Specifically, I took the role of participant-observer (Merriam, 2009) in the CRE, fully engaging in conversations and contributing to the leadership activities. It was Charise's expectation that I was a part of the CRE and was not allowed to sit in the corner and take notes. I sat at the large center table with all the coaches, was assigned to small groups for discussions and tasks, and always had to share my thoughts and experiences along with the coaches. While I did

initially intend to rely on fieldnotes for my observations, my participation quickly made it untenable as I was unable to attend to the level of detail I required for my study. Thus, I relied on audio recording the CRE meetings to provide a full transcript of the discussions, discourses, and interactions and supplemented those recordings with fieldnotes. For example, I would arrive early to describe the setting, participants, and context prior to the meeting and then jot quick notes on my laptop during breaks. I used my fieldnotes to attend to aspects of the activity that would be difficult to capture through audio alone, such as non-verbal cues, tools that were present such as sticky notes and butcher paper, and how individuals were participating and physically interacting with each other. In particular, I noted times and specific moments of tension that may be significant to my analysis in order to highlight and cross-reference with the audio transcriptions. Further, I recorded voice memos on my phone during my drive home from observations to provide my fresh thoughts and reflections for future analysis.

Interviews

I conducted 12 semi-structured interviews (45-90 min each) with my focal participants (CRE) and key leaders in the union and district (Merriam, 2009). I started with the CRE leadership activity to identify the relevant individuals shaping the space. I also employed snowball sampling (Patton, 2002) by asking CRE leaders who else might be significant to my inquiry and used their recommendations, along with my own observations, to identify leaders in the district. These interviews were open-ended to gather background on each participant, history of their work, and perspectives on the nature of collaboration. Interviews were particularly instructive in discerning the participant understandings of their role and object(s) of leadership activity. Importantly, interviews were vital in unearthing and speaking to the tensions, particularly those that involved intuitional boundaries, that were impacting collective leadership

activities and were not always spoken in the collective space. I took notes, audio recorded, and transcribed all interviews.

I also engaged in countless informal conversations as part of my observations, to check my interpretations and elicit participant reflections in "real-time" during activities. For example, I would turn to the coach sitting next to me if I didn't understand the context of a conversation, or ask how coaching was going for them, or inquire about what I may have missed on the group text between meetings. These conversations were enabled through my relationships with the coaches and added to the richness and depth of my data collection.

Artifacts

Finally, I collected artifacts, materials, and tools that were supporting the CRE's equity-focused leadership practice. For example, I examined relevant policy documents such as District Policy 0030 that outlined district racial equity policy and the collective bargaining agreement, governing the district-union collaboration. CRE meeting agendas were especially important in that they illuminated the intended objects of leadership activity and helped clarify CRE goals and purposes. I paid attention to resources Charise provided to the coaches and frameworks that were guiding conversations. I was also given access the coaches Google Drive account to view the tools they co-created such as the coach's handbook, and took photographs of sticky-note sense-making activities that occurred during the meetings. I used the CRE and SEA websites to gain background information on equity-initiatives and kept track of emails that provided insight on participation and communication occurring outside of my observation sites. Artifacts were essential to my process of data collection and triangulation towards understanding the equity-focused leadership activity of the CRE.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was an on-going iterative process that occurred during data collection and beyond (Yin, 2009). I established a practice of writing memos throughout the process, and particularly after key interviews and events, in order to track any methodological and analytic decision and to establish an audit trail (Merriam, 2009). I specifically recorded tensions that I wanted to track across my data and follow-up with participants. I created an excel spreadsheet to organize my observation data with descriptors such as the date, name of participant(s), type of data (i.e., fieldnote, transcript, memo), and a brief summary of the data content in order to sort, classify, and begin to make sense of my data (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014).

In my preliminary round of coding, I engaged in open coding by making hand-written descriptive notes in the margins of a subset of transcripts to familiarize myself with the data and begin identifying broad themes and patterns in the data. I engaged in this inductive process to create a set of initial set of thematic codes in my codebook. Using the qualitative coding software Atlas.ti, I engaged in further rounds of more focused coding, guided by my theoretical and conceptual frameworks to identify relevant concepts in the data towards my emerging findings (Lofland & Lofland, 1995). For example, I coded with the components of CHAT such as object, subject, tools, rules, division of labor, and community to understand the leadership activity system. I kept a "tensions" code to mark when there were conflicting conceptual understandings between subjects, such as disparate theories of change between the CRE and ED, or moments when institutional boundaries were asserting themselves in the CRE activity system.

Memoing throughout the data analysis process provided new insights and understandings that in turn supported the refinement of codes. For example, I read across my object of activity codes to identify the specific goals and activities of the CRE and then returned to the data using those refined object codes. In addition, certain aspects of the activity system became

foregrounded based on the emerging themes from the data. I recognized fairly quickly that subject-subject relations were a key component to how the CRE coaches were conceptualizing racial equity leadership and thus created codes to describe the nature of these relationships. For instance, my grounded relational coding surfaced themes of care, healing, and respect in the CRE. I analyzed across these subsets of codes to understand these ideas as aligned with the notion of politicized trust.

My analytic memos became the basis for my findings. For instance, in attempting to categorize CRE leadership activity, I used code frequency (how often I used the code) and co-occurrences (when I used particular codes together) to identify the central object(s) of activity and what other aspects might be mediating those objects. In particular, I noticed that my coding of organizational and institutional boundaries (i.e., SEA, SPS, ED) were co-occurring with my tension code, and object codes. I also analyzed my data chronologically to see how the objects were shifting over time. Tracking data across time and using multiple sources of data shaped my analysis of the leadership activity of the CRE and how their leadership was informing and being informed within and across institutional boundaries.

Positionality, Limitations, and Answerability

As described above, my role as a UW researcher entering the highly political (and skeptical of outsiders) space of a teachers union created complexity and tension. My activism in the UW graduate student union and previous support of the SEA strike helped "open the door" to this research partnership, even though I am not a K-12 educator. This role as a "union member" alleviated some fear about an "outsider" or "education reformer" coming in to demonize teachers and their unions.

In the more intimate space of the Center for Racial Equity, where nearly all the educators are women of color, being a woman of color from an immigrant family, and committed to racial justice shaped my interactions and experiences within the group. While I originally thought that I would just need to be clear about my positionality (Creswell, 2007), I recognize that it is not about mitigating my "bias" but bringing my full self, with my culture, knowledges, and histories into the learning space to develop and maintain "politicized trust" (Vakil, McKinney de Royston, Nasir, & Kirshner, 2016). This was also Charise's explicit expectation of me and the basis for her invaluable support of my study and on-going participation in the CRE. While I did not center my role in this project, I did engage in particular practices that aimed to cultivate researcher-participant politicized trust. For example, I rejected normative positioning as the "expert" or "neutral observer" by engaging as a meaningful participant in the collective learning activity (Bang & Vossoughi, 2016). I shared my thoughts and insights about theories of leadership that I had learned as both a student and an instructor at UW and named dynamics and tensions that I saw emerge withing and across CRE spaces. In addition, I shared my stories of racialization, resistance, and resilience to continue to build relationships and contribute to a sense of cross-racial solidarity. The CRE retreat was a sleepover, I shared a room with some of the coaches, we talked about our families and communities. We had dinners and happy hours. The CRE was a physical space and an emotional feeling that was healing for me. What developed was more than humanizing research (Paris, 2011) and instead a blossoming of friendships and real kinship (Bhattacharya, 2021). Importantly, these relationships enriched my study and research experience, however, I was still a researcher with my own lens and questions guiding the work. I was not there to simply document the CRE's story or exalt their cause nor was I there to expose

or admonish them. I attempted to hold both the promise and the complexity of leading for racial equity and do that work with care, compassion, and criticality.

And still, the politicized trust I built in the CRE did not extend everywhere. For example, I was not allowed (I asked) to observe the bargaining process between SEA and SPS. I was still an outsider in that context and had to rely on the interpretations of others to understand a critical union-district process that was shaping so much of the work. The largest limitation however was the existence of a global pandemic with the emergence of Covid-19. Schools shut down, we all entered lockdown, and have remained in a state of uncertainty and survival for the last year and a half. For both ethical and practical reasons, I officially counted December, 2019 as the end of my data collection, however, I had intended to speak to a few more SPS leaders and the new CRE coaches in the spring. I would have also liked to do some follow-up interviews after I had gotten deeper in my analysis. In particular, the pandemic limited my ability to share my dissertation findings and create an on-going, and more collaborative process with my participants. My plan was to bring memos to the CRE meetings and discuss my interpretations building a level of transparency and agency with coaches. But there were no more meetings and everyone, including me, was living in a dystopian reality that did not prioritize reading and answering emails. However, my friendships did create new openings to engage throughout my writing process. Specifically, I texted participants when I had questions or needed to corroborate my understandings or timelines of events. In particular, I had a group chat with 3 of the CRE coaches who became an informal and invaluable pathway for feedback and validity through the data analysis process. In addition, I was able to do a round of member checks with my focal participants so they could review their quotes, data, and provide edits, insights, and raise any concerns prior to submission. Charise in particular read the entire dissertation, with such

thoroughness and thoughtfulness she should have been a committee member. In an email to me she stated, “it feels like you know me. I feel appreciated and seen” (11.25.21). These are the people I am answerable (Patel, 2015) to and I feel a deep sense of responsibility to do justice in this work and justice to these relationships. I am committed to continuing these conversations with the participants beyond the dissertation on how best to share and represent this work to broader audiences.

Chapter 3: History and Development of the CRE

Introduction

In line with a CHAT analysis, I begin my findings by elucidating the history and organizational context of the Center for Racial Equity. I describe the origins of the CRE as an intentional site of educator leadership that grew out of early SEA organizing efforts and a perceived need for racial equity leadership that was being unfulfilled by the district. This effort prioritized the knowledge and experiences of women of color and provided a new pathway to leadership that crossed the traditional boundary of union work towards a more expanded role in leading equity-focused systems change.

Building it into the Contract: Codifying the Union in Racial Equity Leadership

Historically, the collective bargaining agreement has been a place to negotiate what counts as teacher work and how that work should be assessed and compensated. Other unions around the country were using their contract to push for issues of equity, but they were much more aligned with familiar logics of unions that couple equity goals with union interests. For example, removing standardized testing is an issue of equity for students *and* it supports union initiatives to decouple educator performance/evaluation from testing. The movement for counselors (or nurses, librarians, social workers) not cops is an important move towards addressing anti-blackness, disproportionate discipline, trauma and violence against black and brown students in schools, *and* it supports union efforts to increase resources, funding, and services that have been cut from schools and impact teacher working conditions.

In Seattle, the 2015 bargain and strike had all the trappings of a traditional union contract negotiations such as compensation and workload, but what I noticed was the rhetoric (similar to many unions around the country) of "bargaining for the common good," or "bargaining for the schools students deserve." However, one unique phrase piqued my interest: "bargaining for

racial equity." The idea of "bargaining for racial equity" had several features, including the mandating of 30 minutes of recess in all schools and the removal of standardized testing from teaching reviews. Yet, this also included the creation of a union-district partnership in the management of racial equity teams (RETs), site specific teams addressing racial disparities in their schools. This became an intriguing and innovative approach to systems level equity leadership that was now contractually mandated.

Getting RETs in the contract was critical to the union, as both accountability from the district and agency for the union to shape district level equity policy implementation. As Vincent, SEA President, reflected:

> It was explicit about racial equity because it went into the contract. Putting it in the CBA made it enforceable, we could grieve it, we could hold people accountable to it. It was about how does the union drive structures that support racial equity? And unless those are built into the contract, they are under the purview of district whim, school board whim, or changing community interest. The contract the union owns, and the district needs to be accountable. Racial equity, we codified that in a contract and now that it's in there it can't go away unless it's bargained out. (Vincent Interview, 12.12.19)

Leveraging the bargaining process and contract as a tool was an important move that was protective and proactive. In our conversation I asked Vincent if there had been other contractual district-union initiatives. He mentioned that they did work with the district around performance reviews and mentorship programs but that, "this was a district-union collaboration about racial equity. We didn't know what it would look like yet but just wanted to get in the contract and then figure it out." The contract not only codified racial equity as a priority, it established the union, and educators, as key actors and agents of change in systems-level racial equity leadership.

Tensions of Systematizing RETs While Centering Educator Agency and Expertise

Racial Equity Teams (RETs) were unique as a union initiative that explicitly centered racial equity, sought to shape policies and practices in schools, and implicated teaching and

learning. It is an initiative that pushes on the traditional role of a union, infringes on certain notions of teacher autonomy, and objectively creates *more* work for educators. But, as SEA leadership stated, it is what educators wanted (Seattle Education Association, 2017). And importantly, it was what educators were already doing.

RETs grew from informal educator-driven efforts in their individual schools. These efforts were haphazard and varied in success. As Vincent shared,

> Informal, loose equity teams had formed out in buildings. They were building teams that were diving into discipline or their own data, it might not have been called equity teams, even though there have always been activist teachers doing equity work together. But there was not a clear direction of what to do with that data and people were making it up as they went along. We were able to leverage the contentious nature of bargaining and knowing that our members cared about racial equity work, that became the launching point for being a successful strike. We definitely didn't strike over RET but that was definitely where the energy of our team was.

Systematizing RETs as a district-wide initiative through the contract created an opportunity for both SPS and SEA, though with various tensions. In the year prior to the bargain, the district was in the middle of rebranding their equity department (ED) and saw RETs as a critical leadership initiative to amplify the ground-up work of educators while creating systems of support for racial equity. RETs were particularly well aligned with their racial equity policy 0030, which had existed on the books for a few years, but lacked implementation. As one district employee shared, "the policy is incredibly powerful in all the tenets and what it asks people to do. And there's no accountability for enacting the policy or for operationalizing it. And so, it has no teeth" (Interview, 11.22.19). RETs became a fortuitous vehicle to leverage the policy as a tool for enacting actionable goals, processes, and outcomes towards racial equity.

As part of the system of support for RETs, SPS piloted a cohort model for the school site RETs and district-run racial equity institutes for teams to attend as professional development.

However, this move to bring RETs under the district purview and create common language, understandings, and process brought its own tensions and concerns from SEA.

Specifically, SEA also saw RETs as a space of systems-level leadership, particularly for educators. As RETs were an educator driven initiative, they felt the leadership should come from within, led by educators and responsive to the needs of educators. As Vincent described,

> Rank and file educators are closest to the work. They are closest to the students SPS is serving. They are engaging with their families. They are the closest to their communities where they are seeing and experiencing those disparities. They see and feel it. Anything ground up from the building and rank and file level oftentimes provides a better frame for the work than a top-down initiative. It cultivates the climate and culture so racial equity is embedded in the work we do. If it was the central office or principals, I don't think it would be the same.

It was important to SEA to protect the educator-centric and educator-led piece of RETs, and to keep these teams under the union umbrella. As the district moved to formalize RETs and put more systems in place, SEA felt the need to preserve the integrity of the work, compensate educators for their labor, and maintain autonomy, recognizing that educators are the experts.

> RETs provide SEA rank and file members a way to come together to identify what systems in schools, data, climate/culture of school, how do those things reflect the idea that, our language at the time, let us authentically close opportunity gaps. They [educators] said we need time and a stipend to do the work while also giving RETs the autonomy to do what they needed to do… they [schools] all need different things. We don't want to box it in too much. What educators need is time and space to do the work they need to do. (Vincent Interview, 12.12.19)

In particular, educators voiced their discontent with the quality of the district-run racial equity institutes and SEA leadership saw the lack of compensation for attending these trainings as a labor issue. If the district was going to now champion RETs as their new equity initiative, then SEA would ensure that educators would have the time, space, and resources to meaningfully implement, and ideally lead, the process.

Shifting SEA: Building Equity Leadership from Within

SEA taking up "bargaining for racial equity" was not a coincidence. It was the result of a concerted effort over time to engage union membership, prioritize their needs and interests, and build union power. Amidst a national backdrop of increased anti-union legislation and declining union participation, SEA, similar to other NEA affiliates, began employing grassroots organizing techniques to strengthen their base and re-ignite their members, years before the eventual strike. In particular, SEA had joined a broader community organizing coalition called the Sound Alliance that trained union leaders in traditional, Alinsky based organizing practices of relational organizing and power analysis. SEA leadership used their new skills to engage in a series of building "blitzes," stopping by schools unannounced and talking to educators during their prep times in their classrooms to build relationships, better understand issues they faced, learn how educators were already leading in their schools, and what they wanted from their union. The then-SEA Vice President, Joan, a white woman and former special education teacher, spoke about these blitzes as a form of relational organizing to "engage all of our members, not just if you actively are always involved" (Interview, 2015). She remarked how this process had never been done before in the union and the ways the questions evolved over time, depending on the context and needs. As she shared in our interview,

> **Joan:** The first question was what issues do you see in public education, second question was what issues do you see in the building or in the district - the first one was right around the campaign for Governor Inslee, so we asked them any thoughts on the Governor's race. And the last question was actually the question that we went in really to find out was - who are the trusted and respected leaders in your building, the trusted and respected teachers. At the end of each day we'd have a list of all the - these big posters - with all the names. And then we'd ask 60-80% of the school and we'd collect all the names at the end. We put a red dot next to people we talked to so that we'd see how many we talked to, a blue dot next to how many times their names were mentioned, then we found the trusted and respected person in each building.

> **Aditi:** You essentially did a social network analysis of the school.
>
> **Joan**: We did a power analysis of the schools. We've done that in about 70 schools over the years. And depending what's going on, things have changed. So this last time that we went out. We not only asked who was trusted and respected, we asked why. A lot of it came up to, the responses were around instructional leaders, it was all about their craft they were a respected person because they were good at their job. So what we've been doing for the last couple of years is when we form a committee or do any type of work we start building relationships with those leaders.

This process of building power and identifying trusted leaders became foundational to shaping the next collective bargain and future union initiatives. Specifically, the member organizing and blitzes radically shifted the bargaining table during the contentions contract negations of 2015. The leadership strategy was two pronged. First, they focused on tapping the existing influential school-based educator leaders to take up union-level leadership, many of whom had never participated in the union. Second, they wanted to expand opportunities for leadership to members that had the lived experiences to inform a more equitable contract, particularly beyond certified classroom teachers, recognizing that many of the educators of color serve in support staff positions. As part of the national union effort to "bargain for the public good," Joan mentioned that some unions, such as in Saint Paul, MN had even brought in community members to join the union bargaining team. While SEA did not open up their process beyond their membership, they still built a bargaining team that represented a broad coalition of over 40 members to be the most racially diverse and inclusive across roles and position in SEA history.

Bargaining for racial equity held a more significant weight when those advocating for change were already the respected experts, and leaders of color, in their schools. Vincent, a Filipino male elementary educator and one of those respected educator leaders of color spoke about entering union leadership through the bargaining process. He had done a bit in the union space by becoming a building representative after his 8th year of teaching. After his involvement

in the bargaining team, he became SEA Vice President and was President at the time of my study. In our interview he shared,

> That [bargaining] was the first forum and arena where I witnessed topics of racial equity being discussed. We would discuss issues of racial equity at my school, disproportionate discipline of our African American boys at [school]. When we would recognize those patterns, and you know, how do we disrupt those patterns at a building level. I didn't know that other buildings were doing similar things. I think in buildings, you tend to be siloed. Then here we are, 40 people from different buildings, different programs, para educators, para professionals, librarians, certificated teachers saying, "Oh yeah, us too, us too." So that was really kind of a catalyzing moment for myself and then also I think for union leaders as a whole, who said, "Hey, you this is an important issue for all of our educators, no matter where they are in the city."

These building blitzes and bargaining process served two critical purposes: to identify issues that were important to educators and to identify current educator leaders who could be recruited to lead equity work from within the union. One consistent theme through the over 2,000 one-on-one educator conversations was an interest in issues of equity and diversity in Seattle Public Schools (SEA Center for Racial Equity, 2017). While the understanding of equity was highly varied across educators, the naming of this as a priority and the simultaneous recognition of the lack of attention and capacity to effectively address these issues in the district both bolstered the support of the SEA contract and catalyzed the efforts of educators, largely educators of color, who had long been advocating for support in dismantling racial inequities in education. As the nation saw the rise of the Black Lives Matter movement, and unions across the country spoke out about issues such as disproportionate discipline and white supremacy, SEA seized the momentum and the collective moment to create the Center for Racial Equity[10], an initiative that directly sought to respond to the needs and priorities of educators through the leadership of their own members.

[10] Formally the Center for Race & Equity. The name change from race & equity to the now racial equity signifies an important shift in the ways the collective understanding and comfort of SEA members to explicitly name race as the anchor and mission of the center, a move that, while always was the intention

Building on the energy from a successful strike and bargain and the newly created "partnership" with SPS around the implementation of racial equity teams (RETs) in schools, SEA moved quickly to solidify the CRE as part of the formal structure of the union. Specifically, the new initiative needed resources and leadership. As Vincent shares,

> It was in a planning meeting after I became Vice President of SEA. It was a year after the bargain and RETs were starting to come online. We got a big Lighthouse grant from NEA to build something. The NEA Center for Organizing was investing in members to build power in their unions. They were housing all of these different institutes around learning, leadership, staff... But what to do with RETs? Who owns these teams? It [RETs] was administered by a partnership committee made up of SEA and SPS that would review applications. But who supports RETs?
>
> We had discussions of why can't a union explicitly house an institute or entity with a focus on racial equity work? That sounds awesome! There was no blueprint, but we had the money. We knew it would take a dedicated person, it needed to have a person. It was called project coordinator at the time and we hadn't even named it Center for Race and Equity yet.

In 2016, the SEA representative assembly voted to release an educator to become the inaugural project coordinator (later Director) for the new initiative. Through the blitz and bargaining process, SEA leadership identified Charise, a biracial Black woman and former 4th grade teacher, as a powerful leader of equity work and a widely respected educator in the district. "We knew who we wanted, Charise, and she had identified other leaders. She had the equity literacy we needed" (Vincent Interview, 12.12.19). Charise applied for the position and became the first Director for the CRE.

Seeding the Beginnings of Politicized Trust

Charise got to work immediately, even though "the work" had yet to be defined. Building off of the one-on-one and a series of focus groups in the community, Charise began identifying her team. When I asked about her process, she responded that she was just,

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of the Charise and the CRE founders, but received too much pushback from membership at the time of inception.

> following where people moved me to. If I did a one on one and I was like, “Who do I need to talk to? Who else do I need to?” Then they gave me a name or something like that. Then I would follow in that way (Charise Interview, 12.6.19).

While the other union members mentioned the persistence of union leaders like Joan in recruitment, Charise explicitly recognized the racialized nature of her role and the additional time she took to build trust. She named how many educators would not attend the focus groups because “a lot of people were distrustful” and how she needed to do specific follow ups. She understood the ways the union had been viewed, particularly in communities of color, and how her position and positionality could be viewed as purely symbolic. As she shared,

> I had to deal with the issue from people that I thought mattered, who basically thought I was a token. So I had to make sure that I was doing it right, so they wouldn't think I was a token. (Charise Interview, 12.6.19).

Charise describes the experience as an organic process of following her gut, finding points of connection, and “kicking it with folks” she had never kicked it with before. The majority of people who would join her initial team (and later become coaches in the CRE) were recruited from Charise’s interactions in the focus group spaces and trusting educators when they told her to meet someone.

> There was a couple of people that got volun-told on me. Like, "Here, you need to work with this person because they're a leader in the community." And I was sitting there like, "I don't know what the hell I'm doing anyways", so like, "Sure, okay I'll take them." (Charise Interview, 12.6.19)

By following the lead of educators of color and honoring their expertise, Charise assembled a project design team of educators (including a Filipino man, two Black women, a Latinx woman, and a white woman) to begin to materialize a vision for the CRE. Charise’s efforts and

relationship building during the development of the CRE emerged from a place of racialized solidarity, the beginnings of politicized trust.

Montgomery County: The Power of Educator-Lead Learning

"The Center for Racial Equity was created as a double-sided piece of paper. There was just an idea" (Charise, Fieldnote, 3.29.19). But with that idea and a design team, Charise and colleagues headed to Montgomery County. As part of a national agenda of union leadership and organizing, NEA Center for Organizing held a series of institutes at six sites (Montgomery County, Seattle, St. Paul, Milwaukee, Louisiana, and New Mexico) across the country as learning hubs for affiliate members to gather, learn, and strategize together (MCEA, 2021). Charise and Vincent both name their trip to Montgomery County as the real "launch" for the Center for Racial Equity.

Charise and team attended the three-day Montgomery institute designed to support local unions in creating their own theory of change. However, instead of focusing on SEA, the design team used the structure and space to instead imagine what their new equity initiative could be. As Vincent shares, "most people use it as a lens for theory of change for their union, but we were utilizing theory of change to create a union housed center for racial equity [...] we used it to brainstorm what CRE does" (Interview, 12.12.19).

While the institute did not explicitly focus on racial equity, the model of a union housed institute and methods of educator lead and facilitated spaces were the foundation to the creation of the CRE. As Charise states,

> They led us through a lot of that work. And a lot of it was also them showing us what they did and, and what they're now offering and things like that. And so, there was one point when we had seen about for two days some amazing people facilitating. These are all educators. That's probably a huge reason why I just think we have to do it this way. Educators have to lead it. And it was because they just gave such great models. (Fieldnotes, 8.12.19)

The Montgomery County institute was a critical experience for the design team. They felt first-hand the power of educator-lead learning and the connection to a national movement of educator activism.

Charise and team were also introduced to new tools and frameworks such as Paul Gorski's equity literacy, which would become the guiding framework for their own center and shape much of their future work. Returning to Seattle with a first draft of a mission statement and a vision, the Center for Racial Equity was born.

Sustainability and Union Autonomy: Funding as a Commitment to Racial Equity

Funding the CRE through the union was an important signal of union priorities and agency. While initial investment in the form of a grant from NEA helped kickstart the initiative and support Charise's position, another source of one-time funding came in the form of a union grievance against the district over the loss of pay for long-time substitute teachers. The grievance resulted in a settlement agreement paid by SPS to SEA. After the employees were compensated for their time, SEA leadership earmarked the remaining settlement balance to be used to finance the educators and resources of the CRE.

After the first two years, and the depletion of the NEA grant, funding for Charise's position and resourcing for the CRE primarily came from union member dues through a vote by the SEA board and representative assembly. This change in funding source was consequential to the mission of CRE and the union. "We fund CRE through union dues. It's the first step as a union committed to racial equity and ensuring the sustainability of CRE" (Vincent Interview, 12.12.19). Since the original vote, SEA continued to vote to increase funding to the CRE and recently voted to add another half time position. In this way, racial equity is an investment by

members in their own learning and a way to align their resources with their values. And it ensures that the CRE remains independent of the district.

Theories of Change within the CRE

The Mission of the Center for Racial Equity is to empower educators, both individually and collectively to dismantle racial injustice in the SEA, our schools, our community, and our profession.

We will do this by:

- *Educating our members on issues of equity and equitable teaching*
- *Supporting educators to take leadership in creating equitable public education*

www.searacialequity.com

The original planning and design team (which disbanded after the first year) helped launch the above mission for the CRE; however, SEA still didn't know what the CRE would actually do in their daily practice and what it looked like to implement these goals. What they did know was that it needed to be educator driven and meet the needs of teachers and staff in schools committed to advancing racial equity. Thus, the first task of the CRE was to convene the rank-and-file educators invested in racial equity work to identify areas of interest towards concrete action. As Vincent states,

> Seattle is a big district, we work in silos, we know explicit racial equity work is happening all over the place. The union should be the structure to connect those people together – and see what happens! You get the right people in the room and throw some issues at them and get out of the way and see what happens. (Interview, 12.12.19)

Vincent made it clear that this effort was all about the educator leaders already doing the work. His role was just to "frame it under the union umbrella" but mostly to let people do what they already do, but now do it together. This idea of de-siloing by getting the "right" people together and seeing what happens was a primary theory of change for the CRE. While not always explicit

in the recruitment, Charise knew that "the right" people meant the CRE needed to be educators of color.

CRE Summit: Catalyzing the Expertise of Educators of Color

This theory of de-siloing applied not only to individual educators with the union, but also to the organization itself. Using her position as SEA leadership, Charise formed close working relationships with leaders of other racial equity initiatives within both the union and the district. This included the culturally responsive teaching cadre, a district initiative of educator leaders focused on growing the culturally responsive teaching practices of educators in SPS, the social equality educators, a socialist caucus within SEA that was leading campaigns such as Black Lives Matter at school, and the ethnic studies advisory board, a collective of educators creating ethnic studies curriculum and pushing for its adoption in Seattle Public Schools. All of these initiatives involved the work of educator leaders advancing racial equity, albeit towards their own goals and within their own spheres.

Drawing on her relationships and network, Charise co-planned and gathered educator leaders, primarily leaders of color, across these union and district initiatives for a CRE Summit, making the inaugural gathering for the CRE a cross-organizational, boundary spanning project, housed within the union. The summit was a space to bring folks together, figure out where the energy was in terms of priorities, and give leaders time to connect and strategize. It was a time to do the relational organizing to build connections and community with other racial equity activists.

In addition, the summit seeded several work groups of educators who had interests in specific equity initiatives such as addressing disproportionate discipline, de-tracking and the

highly capable program, and culturally responsive teaching, as well as recruiting more folks into the movement for ethnic studies. As Vincent reflected,

> That first year we had a summit that had different work groups. Ethnic studies got jump started through that first year of CRE. At the summit, Ethnic studies was a track, there were components of it. We saw all of these people were interested in it and they were coming together from across buildings. It really moved and there was momentum. Since then, ethnic studies has become part of the district initiative and Marta is leading that work. We didn't make ethnic studies happen, but I'm not sure it would have happened as quickly if CRE hadn't connected people – brought people together. (Interview, 12.12.19)

As Vincent mentioned, the following year after the summit, Marta, a Xicanx middle-school teacher and an original CRE design team member, was hired by SPS as the Ethnic Studies Program Manager, solidifying ethnic studies as a district priority[11]. In this way, the CRE was a catalyst for district-wide equity initiatives that centered the expertise and experiences of educators.

Racial Equity Coaches: The Leaders of the CRE

The initial years of the CRE were primarily focused on relationship building and de-siloing educators, creating loose structures to convene folks from across the district. However, leadership quickly recognized that there was this energy post-bargaining and the summit which created an opportunity to do more than simply bring together educators; they could actually lead.

The new union contract explicitly stated that RETs were a district-union initiative, however, there still were not adequate supports in place to implement RETs, leaving educators frustrated. Educators were asking for resources beyond the district provided Saturday professional development institutes. "It was an identified need" (Vincent Interview, 12.12.19). Educators wanted guidance, coaching, and mentorship that was specific to their schools and

[11] The move to make Ethnic Studies part of SPS remains quite contentious. While it was an important step of recognition and accountability from the district, it also created a dynamic of co-opting and a sense of tokenism as Marta became a department of one. The ethnic studies movement was beyond the scope of my dissertation; however, several educators overlap between ethnic studies and the CRE, impacting the broader context of the work.

equity concerns. SEA leadership saw this as an opportunity to use the CRE to bridge the policy to practice gap, and lean on the expertise of educators, particularly those who had experience on their own RETs. As Vincent shared,

> Charise kept getting calls about RETs, the equity analysis tool and other resources. The Saturday institutes were created by the partnership committee and we knew that Charise couldn't do it by herself. Any group can benefit from coaching and we had the money. Originally, we thought maybe mini grants to RETs but we weren't sure how that would work. But we knew that RETs needed in-building support and so we created the Partners (later Coaches) program.

The district had created a void that the union was perfectly positioned to fill. Charise was given funding and control to hire "equity literate" educators as CRE Racial Equity Coaches to partner with new equity teams to support their goals. Coaches would remain full-time educators and receive a small stipend and release time to engage in this work. While the CRE was still affiliated with the other racial equity initiatives and worked in solidarity with various movements, the Coaches program was the cornerstone of the CRE and primary space of leadership activity. As such, the Coaches were the CRE, and the two became synonymous in my study.

Importantly, the coaches Charise recruited and hired into the CRE were more than just equity literate: they were racial equity leaders, and from the beginning Charise framed them as such. All the coaches were engaged in racial equity initiatives through participating and leading their individual school RETs. I also learned that all the coaches had some level of involvement in the ethnic studies movement as early collaborators, curriculum writers, or advisory board members. They also took up leadership roles in their schools around Black Lives Matter week facilitating programing, creating lesson plans, and showing solidarity for the movement, even when there wasn't widespread support at their school. The CRE wasn't creating leaders, it was

de-siloing and harnessing the collective power of these leaders and giving them a platform and opportunity to elevate that leadership from within their union to impact the district.

Growing Politicized Trust: Coaches' Motivations for Joining the CRE

I was particularly curious about the coaches motivations for joining the CRE. From my observations there were other equity focused initiatives in the union and district, and as discussed previously, these women of color were already individually leading in multiple spaces. Even though these leaders were doing a lot, frequently talking about the "brown tax" (i.e., the same person of color having to do everything), they were in fact not all doing everything. They were actively making choices about how they engaged and who they engaged with. They were selecting the CRE for a reason.

For one, some of the coaches mentioned the draw of getting a stipend for being a CRE coach. There were so few paid opportunities for full-time educators and as people of color they were doing that "work for free" all the time. Even the small stipend showed a higher level of commitment and respect that was better than nothing. As Liz described, it was exciting to be "recognized for your work with a little payment. Never enough, right? But at least it's a start" (Interview, 10.29.19). However, the stipend was not the primary motivation for coaches, nor did they view it as adequate compensation for the amount of hours and energy they invested.

Secondly, Charise was a lynchpin for this effort either personally recruiting coaches or coaches reaching out to Charise about the opportunity directly. Lani, Liz, and Rita had developed relationships with Charise through previous equity efforts and named her leadership of the CRE as particularly influential to their decision to join. It brought hope (Liz, Interview, 10.29.19). Even when coaches didn't personally know Charise, they had a trusted colleague or friend who suggested the opportunity and vouched for her. In Kat's case, she sought out Charise based on a

respected co-worker. As she shared, “I was like, Charise, I’m Kat. Whatever you are doing, please God let me know. I really want to be part of it” (Interview, 8.27.19). For Taylor, it was her former co-worker and friend Vincent, SEA VP; so, when Vincent and Charise made the ask to coach, she trusted Charise by proxy. As the coaches shared, having someone like Charise approach you to coach was powerful. Serena’s experience in particular exemplifies Charise’s role in this decision-making process:

> Honestly don't know how she found me… But we had a sit down where she was talking. We had a conversation about racial equity work. I don't remember what the purpose was, but I think we got along well and honestly, I think she saw something in me, I don't know what? From then, one of my coworkers sent me the application to be a CRE coach. I was really hesitant about it because I know that our district adopts things for a little bit and then they drop them. I know that our district asks a lot of POC and does not support us well in doing that. I was like, this sounds really nice. The money doesn't seem like enough to do it. I was kind of offended when I saw the amount of money they were offering. I was like, are you serious? I met with Charise and I asked her all of my questions because I know the amount of privilege that I have of my experience of being at [school name] where doors have been opened and not shut to me, I was very hesitant to put the concept of coaching another racial equity team. In particular, I was like, I don't want to go into white spaces and feel like I'm an outsider or feel like who is this person that is telling us what to do? I was also like, I don't know if I know what to do. So she talked to me about it at length and convinced me to apply. She was like, you can do this and you're already doing these things. (Interview, 12.10.19)

For Serena, it was Charise’s faith in her as a leader and affirming how she was already a leader. It wasn’t the (offensive) amount of money or that she was seeking out leadership opportunities. She knew the racialized dynamics of the district and questioned both if it would be worth the energy and if she was even worthy. But it was the time Charise spent, having multiple conversations, building that relationship, answering questions, that was enough to convince Serena that the CRE was the right place to be.

Charise’s individual role in the CRE cannot be overlooked, and the CRE was still more than Charise. As the following sections illuminate, I learned that the CRE was not only

organizationally filling a knowledge and capacity void in district leadership, but also filling a personal void for these educators by becoming a site of leadership that aligned with their values, legitimized their expertise, and honored their identities as women of color.

Racial Battle Fatigue: Repairing District Trauma through Centering Women of Color

One thing that stood out to me in my interviews with these leaders is the amount of harm they had experienced as women of color in the district prior to the CRE. This was particularly intense for some of the more seasoned educators and drove their desire to join a place like the CRE. For instance, Flor's 17 years in the district was marked with racialized trauma. She spoke about several racial incidents with white educators, parents, and specifically administration, describing discrimination, intimidation and bullying that made teaching untenable, and eventually pushed her out of the classroom and into a specialist role. She talked about working in four different elementary schools, the racism of the "passive progressives" who were "all about being nice," and the consequences of speaking up and standing up for herself. As she shares,

> **Flor**: One of the things that really totally traumatized me is because when I finally broke that rule [staying silent], I literally stood up and said, "I want you all to know what it feels like to be a brown person in this room." Right? And that got translated as, "You white people are bad." A white woman actually accused me of scaring her and looming over her. Those are her words, "You loomed over me."
>
> **Aditi**: How can you loom, you're so small?!
>
> **Flor**: I know! Well she was sitting down, I was standing up.
>
> **Aditi**: Oh sure.
>
> **Flor**: I feel I did this because she was telling me that I should get advice from the district to lead these conversations about race. And I said, "You know what, I used to work with the district doing workshops with the people who used to be in that department, so no I don't need their advice." That's what I did, I just did that. And in her mind, that was looming, and I put her in fear, and she had demanded an apology.

Following this incident was the first time Flor went on medical leave from the district, one of two medical leaves in her SPS tenure, and soon after left the school. These types of racist incidents were compounding and taking a toll on her mental and physical health. The day I interviewed Flor, she was preparing for a staff meeting at her new school. She was visibly anxious and emotional, anticipating similar dynamics to those described above that have repeatedly caused harm. Even though she recognized being more empowered and self-assured than in previous years, she still talked about having PTSD around being evaluated and experiencing panic attacks. We ended up cutting the interview short and rescheduling to hold space for those feelings and to strategize about supports and self-care.

Flor's experiences highlight the toxic and hostile environment for a woman of color committed to racial equity. She spoke about how her story was one of many, of educators of color being wrongly evaluated and pushed out of schools. It didn't matter what school she worked in. It was the entire system, not just bad principals, based in colonial, white supremacist logics that left her and so many others exhausted and unwell.

For a long-time educator like Flor, applying to be a coach with the CRE was an act of resistance and resilience. She was the only educator I spoke with who joined the CRE without any relational connection to Charise. It was a decision entirely to prove to herself and the white educators and administration that doubted her expertise.

Flor states,

> So it's directly tied to me going on medical leave, and that comment of, "I don't know what I'm doing. I'm not qualified." And so in order to survive, to save myself, I got mad and I said, "I'm going to show them. I'm going to show them. I'm going to apply for this position, I'm going to get it, and I'm going to show them." (Flor Interview, 8.29.19)

The CRE was an opportunity to validate her expertise as a woman of color and social justice educator. It was a way to exert agency and refute a system that continued to microaggress and

devalue her labor (at best) and traumatize (at worst). And importantly it provided a legitimized space to enact leadership for her own wellbeing and the wellbeing of others.

Kat shared some similar experiences as Flor. In her time in SPS she recounted feeling both “erased in the colorblind system” and also tokenized when it was convenient to say, “look we have a person of color over there” (Interview, 8.27.19). Kat also went on a medical leave due to harassment from administration. She shared, “I had a baby and I had requested a schedule so I could pump every three hours, and that was denied because it was too big of an impact on the school. That's what I was told by the administration” (8.27.19). She was told she could report the bullying and sexual harassment to the district but felt unsupported. It became too much and she left her school of 13 years for an opening at a school in the [white] north end near her home. She thought, “how bad could it be?” But it was bad. Kat shared,

> It was so different. It was so different. I was like, "Oh, my God, what have I done?" Because before I didn't realize that... Well, I didn't get along with my staff very well or I was a little separate from them. I had great relations with students. I had this really, really amazing classroom in the South End with so many languages and so many cultures and so much energy and exuberance. And then I felt like at [school name] it's very traditional, very high on standards. I'd heard all this messaging about like they're a really progressive school, but I was like, "It feels like 1996 in here." Maybe back then it was, but now this is not...So I just immediately got really defensive about again who I was working with, partnered with a white male, the white male department head, looking for people to collaborate with, asking questions like, "Why are we talking about the master narrative and do we want to use those words?" And like, "No." (Interview, 8.27.19)

The development of the CRE came at the perfect time for Kat. A respite amidst a horrible time and a “sea of whiteness.” Kat recalls her first interaction with Charise,

> Charise came one afternoon to meet me, and it was really hard to tell what she thought of me because she kept it real close to the chest and was probably feeling me out. And I was like, "Look at this racist shit and look at this racist shit." And there's people in here that don't want to hear about… you know. I didn't know what to do. I just knew that I had to do something. (Interview, 8.27.19)

In both Flor and Kat's stories, the choice to join the CRE was driven by resistance to an oppressive school and district environment that had caused racial harm and a sense of agency to do something about it. In particular, their identities as women of color were targeted in the district and they sought opportunities that would attend to their specific needs. For some of the younger educators like Rita and Lani, they were explicit about seeking women of color mentorship and prioritizing those opportunities. While all the coaches had their own rationales for joining the CRE, a commonality was an overarching idea that whatever was being cultivated in the CRE, it was centering women of color, and that was enough to at least give it a try.

Racialized Boundaries between the CRE and SEA

The coaches viewed the CRE as a leadership effort distinct from and in response to the whiteness of the district, but the relationship with the union was a bit more complicated. Even though the CRE is a union initiative, paid through union dues, and housed at the SEA offices, the coaches largely did not identify with the union or consider the union to be a motivation for becoming a coach. All of the coaches expressed gratitude that they were in a union and understanding the importance of the labor movement. But most often I heard that the coaches had "minimal involvement" with the union prior to the CRE or had previous negative experiences that shaped their lack of engagement.

As Taylor shared, she just didn't "know or utilize the union in any way" (Interview, 11.21.19). Whereas Flor called the union "unintelligible" like it was a "whole different country" (Interview, 12.2.19). Serena thought it was purposely obtuse,

> I just don't get it. No. I mean, there's really specific language that union active people use, and I don't have that language. I don't even know where to find it. There are very clear systems that people are aware of and how they work and how to make things happen. It just seems really convoluted systems that are not made for people to enter them. They're certainly not inviting. (Interview, 12.10.19)

These perceptions of the union implied a (perhaps less explicit) form of whiteness, codified in the language and systems of "Robert's Rules of Order" that pushed away, or at least didn't attract, these equity-focused educators. Given that SEA had been investing in member empowerment and community organizing, I was a little surprised these activist educators hadn't seen the union as a site of leadership. However, Kat pointed out that these union efforts were not interesting because they were not about racial equity. As she pointed out,

> They were organizing. They're all organizing, right? Even then it was bargaining for pay, for library service. I don't mean to be dismissive because I know those are functions for equity… but SEA has generally been pretty light on equity. I've never been attracted to whatever it was that they were like, "Put on your shirt and let's go outside." I'm like, "I don't want to. Whatever it is you were doing, I don't want to." That's how I know it's never been about racial equity because I would not be like, "I don't care about racial equity." You know? If it had been like we're bargaining for equity, I would have been out there the whole time. You know? That's how I know that there was never a real... that it was coated in whiteness in the union. (Interview, 8.27.19)

To most of the coaches, the union was not immune from the whiteness in the district. If anything, the union was complicit and perpetuating those same dynamics. Some coaches also had more negative experiences with the union that only amplified the racism and harm from the district. For example, Flor felt the union didn't support her during her battles with racist administration. Rita shared how the union didn't actually care about her school, an alternative public school that served recent immigrants and refugees. Her school made waves in the media when a new principal threatened to call immigration on students at prom and teachers had made countless complaints. As she recalled,

> We had a racist principal that was directly harming students. The union was really good at big statements like Black Lives Matter, but they weren't able to do anything with on the ground issues. One of the union officials told us we could vote no confidence, but it wouldn't do anything. We didn't get any advice. We were being harassed and students and teachers were being impacted. (Interview, 12.10.19).

The district had already failed them by making her school, as the news headline read a "dumping ground for a problem principal," who had previous documentation of berating teachers and a lack of cultural competence. And the entity that should have supported the teachers, the union, abandoned them. Rita mentioned that she had been approached by the union previously to help inform the collective bargaining agreement because of her experience on one of the original RETs and agreed to an interview with Joan. However, she told me that further engagement with the union was not worth her time because "They just wanted something from me, they were not paying me or valuing me, and they did not help us when we needed it" (Rita, Interview, 12.10.19).

Rita made it clear that she only had the time and energy to be involved in spaces that were aligned with her equity values and helped her be a better teacher for her students. She came to the CRE because she knew it could grow a racial equity skillset that would support her as an ELL math teacher and help her grow. "That's where I owe my allegiance" (Rita, Interview, 12.10.19).

Liz also talked about prioritizing what mattered to her in the leadership decisions she was making. As she expressed,

> I was jaded to the union. And it wasn't like I had a personal case, or... But I just did not see it standing up for and batting for the people who needed them. And supporting the people who really should be up in the system. It's got to be what's this work going to do for me and how is it going to help me be better for my kids. (Interview, 10.29.19).

Liz really highlighted this common sentiment from the coaches, that they were investing in opportunities that were mission-driven and values aligned. I asked Liz how she viewed SEA now and she responded,

Liz: Working on being less white, and seeking, and reaching out, and at first it

> was like, I'm one of your tokens, I'm a brown person that's in middle schools. But it was like, but then again why not? So I'm going to try it. And I think it wants to be, but I don't think it knows how.
>
> **Aditi**: Yeah. That's very generous.
>
> **Liz**: No, I really don't. And when I say how, creating an atmosphere where people of color got you. That's the how. I mean there's the asking, but there's the, number one, why should I trust you? Number two, show me that this is going to be an opportunity for me to weigh in in an influential way, in an influential way in changing a system. I think it has a lot of potential but also, it's still part of the keeping the system in place kind of thing. Because we all breathe it, right? The smog.

Liz specifically pointed to the power of the CRE in that systems change. That was the leadership space where "people of color got you" and had the potential to disrupt the whiteness smog of the union.

Within Union Boundaries: Carving a Space Outside the White Male Gaze

Further, I explicitly asked the coaches about the Social Equality Educators (SEE) caucus within SEA[12]. SEE had championed the Black Lives Matter at School initiatives that several of the coaches had participated in at their own schools and had been vocal about issues such as disproportionate discipline and ethnic studies. One of the original caucus leaders was a Black man who was lauded district wide as a champion of racial equity. However, I found that while these women of color acknowledged the powerful work of those educators and their relationships with members of the group, they were choosing not to actively participate in that leadership space. It again came back to whiteness and a lack of focus on racial equity, and the additional dynamic of patriarchy.

[12] Technically SEA does not formally recognize any caucuses within their membership; however, SEE functionally acts as a caucus, regardless of official union designation.

Kat and Lani both experienced racial and gendered microaggressions in the SEE meetings and noting how many men were talking and less and less folks of color were participating. The coaches consensus was that SEE was a white, and particularly male, space. As Flor remarked:

Flor: It was totally male, and also it was union. Undiscovered territory, remember? Why do I want to move to a place where there's only men?

Aditi: None of us want to go there.

Flor: I don't want to go there.

Aditi: Man island.

Likewise, Kat pledged her loyalty to the CRE because it was "women doing the work." She explained, "I know that there's been men in our space, but it does feel like a women-led effort. I don't know. It's the feeling" (Interview, 8.27.19). Further, coaches were not sure what "the ask was" from SEE. Several coaches expressed that SEE was very good at organizing, but they were all over the place. Specifically, they were talking about huge social justice issues like housing inequality or fighting about composting and weren't addressing that, "I have kids of color that are struggling in my classroom right now" (Lani Interview, 12.2.19). Lani went on to share that it felt like they were "tacking on" racial equity to push their own agenda, not prioritizing racial equity. It wasn't feeling meaningful to teaching and learning.

This was particularly interesting because the coaches' perception and experience of the SEE caucus as a white, male-dominated space that was not prioritizing racial equity, coded it, as Flor alluded to, part of the "union." SEE was reifying similar structures and dynamics that were occurring in SEA at large. However, the CRE was also explicitly a union initiative. They were part of the same organization, yet centering women of color in leadership made it something

different, a counter-space, that honored their identities and held clear racial-equity oriented goals that were meaningful to their work as educators.

The Union as a Permeable Boundary to Leadership

In addition, being part of the union did open a particular leadership pathway to district-level leadership that was not previously available to these full-time classroom educators. For example, Flor recognized that she chose the CRE because it was speaking to educators directly, a function of the union, and not administrators, something she understood as district work. However, Lani was the only coach to explicitly speak to the affordances of working within the union and frame the union as a powerful site for elevating her own leadership. As Lani explained,

> I think it [the union] has its problems, but I don't get as much ... I don't get as much pushback in terms of like ... let me say as much and just not like I don't get any, but as much pushback in terms of like a barrier ... like gate keeping as I do, or as I've seen, or as I've experienced within the district. I feel like we talked about the district, you kind of like need a PhD, or you need to have done a dissertation, or you need to have some kind of cert that's tacked on with some form of money or status or connections versus like the union will… I've had a lot of amazing leaders like Charise and Marta and Taylor and Flor and Kat really embraced ... like amplify my voice a lot, which has been nice and be like, "No, I get it ... Lani's only been a cert for a couple of years, but she's like, she knows her shit," which is nice.
>
> And I feel like the union lends itself to that more, like it was created by educators for educators so instead of like the districts that often has this like top-down thing, the union has it too, but like we were all certs or like we were all union-repped at some point, you know, like you're all there at some point versus I feel like the district…there's oftentimes people shoved into positions when they have no experience. We call it, you know, like in the, what's it called? In the trenches. You know, so like that's why I really like union ... or racial equity work in the union because I feel like I've been able to get more traction in it with not as much pushback, or I've been able to navigate those spaces a little bit better.

Lani's analysis highlights the way the union removes barriers to leadership and levels the playing field for educators to take up leadership. She also is naming how the foundations of unions as educator-driven spaces of leadership and activism were aligned with her goals. She continued,

> And so that's why I've been like, I feel really strongly about doing the work there is because it lends itself to it more. I kind of like see it as like the stepping stone, you know? Like, because I can't ... no matter how hard I try and how hard people try for me, or how hard they try for themselves, like get us at the table at the district. And even if I did, I doubt my voice would be heard at all, like at all, like at all. And even then, it probably be like, "Well, she's just angry person," you know, versus I feel like the union allows me to be at the table and then they fight for that, and they automatically have a seat at the table like legally and contractually.

Whether or not the CRE coaches identify with SEA, they are participating in the union. What the CRE has done is create both a pathway for women of color educators to bring them into the union space, as many of the coaches have formal union positions from their involvement with CRE and position them as systemic collective racial equity leadership that elevates their experiences as women of color educators. Coaches came to the CRE because it was promoting a values-aligned racial equity driven-mission and was creating a unique space for racial solidarity. In other words, it was growing and developing the initial stages of politicized trust.

Conclusion: Expanding the role of the union through the CRE

The CRE grew from a concerted effort to de-silo and elevate the expertise of women of color, putting forth a new theory of change towards racial equity leadership and a new role for the union in systems leadership. SEA's early organizing efforts and particularly the leadership of Charise built the respect and relationships to attract equity-focused leaders. These leaders recognized the racialized and gendered boundaries inherent in the organizational contexts of the union and the district. Instead, the CRE prioritized their experiences as women of color to create a counter-space that aligned with their commitments and fostered a burgeoning sense of racialized solidarity and politicized trust. The next chapter dives deeper into the leadership activities of the CRE as they attempt to take up a new role in systems leadership.

Chapter 4:
Racial Equity Leadership as Co-Constructing a Place of Healing and Resilience

Introduction

In this chapter I examine the leadership activity of the CRE by exploring the object(s) or goals they pursued. First, I discuss their primary district-based racial equity initiatives of Racial Equity Team (RET) coaching and professional development. While these leadership activities expanded their role in district-level leadership, they also unearthed tensions of replicating and perpetuating district practices. Importantly, the coaches were also forming a collective critique of the racialized system that was impacting both their racial equity leadership and wellbeing as leaders of color. Thus, the CRE became a place to put forth a vision of racial equity leadership rooted in community, care, and shared commitments. Ultimately, the CRE centered subject-subject relations as the core of their leadership practice towards a vision of educator of color driven systemic change grounded in politicized trust.

Coaching RETs: Individual Leadership of a Shared Activity

The Coaches program was the foundational district leadership effort of the CRE. All of the educators in the CRE were part of their own school RETs and partnered with an "induction" or new racial equity team as their coach. However, what coaching meant and looked like was highly varied across coaches and schools, in part because racial equity teams were so varied in their goals, composition, conditions, and comfort with issues of equity (Ishimaru, Barajas-Lopez, Sun, & LeClair, 2017). RETs were created to be autonomous and responsive to the unique needs of each school community. But that flexibility also created some vagueness and lack of accountability. Coaches entered those spaces as equity literate educators, but without clear directives or goals for their work. Their "coaching" included facilitating meetings, helping set the agenda, creating a mission and vision for the team, planning professional development, attending school events, designing tools to identify equity problems and ask probing questions,

managing difficult team dynamics, providing resources to build equity literacy and fluency, liasoning district processes and procedures, holding space for struggling educators of color, leading racial affinity groups, and so much more.

For example, in a meeting I observed with Liz (RET observation, Middle School, 6.17.19), she was co-facilitating a process of creating a vision statement for the school. We worked in small groups crafting our statements and workshopping the language. However, there were very uncomfortable dynamics during the meeting because of the presence of the principal. He was very vocal in wanting the word "empowerment" as part of the vision statement but was met with silence as none of the educators engaged directly with him in the group conversation. They stuck to the agenda and maintained a strange formality that didn't exist a few minutes prior to the principal entering the room, highlighting some long-standing tensions between the educators and administration. As an outsider, I observed the weight lifting off the room when the principal had to leave the meeting early and the conversation picked up in energy as educators quickly shifted to openly expressing their frustration with administration. They discussed strategy of how they could keep the administration from overpowering and shutting down their work. The team decided that a SEA represented educator needed to join the Building Leadership Team (BLT) in order to ensure that an administrator did not fill that role. In this space, Liz, as the coach was acting as a union leader allying with the educators towards greater voice and influence in the school.

Taylor, however, had a different coaching role in her partner RET. She did not facilitate the meeting and instead took notes to document their process as they discussed the need to change the name of their school that was celebrating a "racist white man" (RET observation, Elementary, 5.20.19). She viewed her role as creating structure, process, and organization for the

team. This included creating her own tools for the team with critical questions and spaces to reflect on their team goals. Towards the end of the meeting she encouraged the team to think about creating a "legacy" document to carry the work forward to the next school year. Taylor's role as a coach was to support the institutionalization of the racial equity work at the school and help sustain it into the future.

Creating a Collective Space for Coaches

Given that the educators of the CRE were called coaches, I assumed that the majority of CRE meeting time would be dedicated to building the skills of coaching and collectively problem solving the obstacles and challenges of teams. While a few of the educators noted that in the very first year they were given a book on coaching teams (Aguilar, 2016) and some resources specific to coaching, all the educators observed that learning how to coach was never the focus of the CRE, even though it was their job. The CRE explicitly recruited coaches who were "equity literate" and had experience on their own RETs (Vincent Interview, 12.12.19). The underlying assumption of this recruitment strategy was that these educators had the expertise necessary to coach a new racial equity team. Thus, enacting an assumed theory of change that educators RET participation and leadership in their own contexts can translate to coaching and leadership in other contexts.

This became a point of tension and frustration for some of the coaches. On one hand, coaches were positioned as the experts, given full agency and autonomy to respond as they deemed appropriate. As Charise intended, the coaches program was a way to affirm their knowledge and validate their lived experiences. They were already racial equity leaders, and this was an opportunity to elevate that leadership in the district.

Yet, many coaches felt there was a disconnect between their own equity literacy and context, and the act of coaching a new team. Specifically, that the CRE should be the place to develop coaching skills. As Serena shared, she hoped she would, "learn how to coach teams and learn how to build racial equity practices in different buildings" (Interview, 12.10.19). When I asked if she learned anything about coaching from the CRE she responded,

> **Serena**: No. No.
>
> **Aditi**: I mean, maybe using your coaching book that they gave you or that manual?
>
> **Serena**: No. I mean, this book has sat on my bedside for months. I thought about using it for coaching my student racial equity team at my school. It's like, we were given this book, we're expected to bring it to our meetings. I've never been told, hey, read this section. It seems like a cool resource and what the fuck are we supposed to do with it? When are we bringing it in?

Similarly, Taylor shared, "there was a binder and a book, but we didn't systematically go through and utilize it" (Interview, 11.21.19). Taylor compared the experience to her teacher education program and the role of residents and mentors. "The resident was just as important as the mentor. You teach the resident, but you also have to teach a mentor. It's like, you can't just like put a coach in an RET, but not train the coach" (Taylor Interview, 11.21.19). However, she did appreciate having the resources and did use some ideas of how to frame questions and adopt coaching stances in her own RET coaching. " I piecemealed what I've learned, but it wasn't from CRE. I did not get that from CRE" (Taylor Interview, 11.21.19).

Other coaches also acknowledged taking it upon themselves to incorporate the material and resources CRE provided into their coaching. Lani shared,

> I used that book a lot. Like I know we never talked about it. We like bought a copy and then we never really used it. But I actually use that a lot within my coaching. But it was all on my own time and I scanned in chapters for my team to read, to develop their leadership skills. I don't ... so I think in a way, they [CRE] amplified what was already there. I would give them that, I would give the CRE that, they amplified what was

> already there, which was great. Did I gain anything new? Probably not. Did I need amplifying, yes. (Interview, 12.2.19)

Coaches recognized that being a part of the CRE was still valuable to their work as coaches, even if it wasn't explicitly teaching concrete coaching skills. For example, Liz mentioned how the CRE has "challenged her" and helped her "grow how to be a facilitator, how to coach, how to think about leadership in general." She still had hope that the, "CRE can actually really teach those even more tangibly" (Liz Interview, 10.29.19). To Liz, learning coaching skills would be wonderful but it was just one piece of what makes the CRE special. Similarly, Flor told me that they "didn't do much learning to coach from CRE" however,

> I think the important thing that the CRE provided was a community, a supportive community where people are doing the same thing, so you're going through the same stuff, and so you get revitalized just knowing who else is trying to do the same thing as you are. (Flor Interview, 12.2.19)

CRE meetings were never devoid of conversations around coaching and teams, but this particular role felt like it was more an individual leadership practice over a collective effort. Coaching was one key facet of their identities as CRE leaders and an area that provided some common language and experience through a shared (although highly varied) role. The CRE was a place to invest in each other and be in community. Coaches were frequently chatting with each other, airing frustrations, sharing "small wins" and supporting each other in their work. It was both deliberate and informal. What the CRE provided was a place to bring those challenges, problems, and issues that were happening in both the partner team RETs and coaches' own schools to a collective processing space. Whether or not they learned how to coach or address the problems of practice, coaching RETs was still an essential space to enact racial equity leadership in schools and the district and an important "area of influence" (Charise, CRE Observation, 1.11.19).

Conflicting Goals and Unrealized Tools

Most coaches expressed a desire for more organization and structure when coaching RETs. They wanted tools for themselves as coaches and tools that they could provide teams to push the work forward. While there were several attempts to create these tools, it was always in fits and starts. There were too many competing priorities and never enough time. Instead, coaches spent time bouncing between discussing problems of practice and attempting to define their roles as coaches within the CRE.

For example, during one CRE meeting Charise asked Flor to lead an activity to discuss problems of practice so that coaches could bring their individual RET issues to the collective group processing space (CRE meeting, 3.8.19). They each wrote individual sticky notes identifying what challenges in their own RETs and the RETs they coached. They then brought the sticky notes to a large window to organize and thematically categorize. The excerpt below shows a bit of this collective sensemaking process and range of issues coaches were grappling with:

Flor: Okay. So here we have four now. Admin: under admin we have gatekeeping, admin and department heads, pushy admin, admin not on board for actual racial equity, admin attends sporadically and don't have a strong equity lens, and the admin presence. Interesting… This one [points to "within our RETs"] is really big. So I'm wondering if this get, can at some point be broken down into two. So here it goes: how to give coaching, coaching teams, timely coaching and the coaching that they need. So many ideas, narrowing focus on building? So Taylor, you wrote that, right?

Taylor: Yeah.

Flor: Can you say a little bit more about that?

Taylor: I just, since the beginning of the year, the team I'm coaching at [school name], they want to do like everything [group: yeah]. They want to do parent night, they want to do a thing for kids, they want to overhaul discipline, and they want to train teachers and so, especially as being a

first-year racial equity team, it's just building its membership and all of that. And I'm having a hard time being like, well, which thing can we get done?

Flor: And vast knowledge of differences in equity literacy?

Kat: Can I interrupt because I think there's a category that I'd like to add in here. And that is like this [points at group] CRE work, but I think that the RET work is like out there [pointing out window] versus some of the things I brought up. I want to build capacity in here. Can I introduce another category for shuffle? Because that's what I meant when I said this. I want to really like, okay, let me start writing grants or what do I need to do? I want to make this happen. So that's kind of what I meant, here, so I don't know if anyone else meant anything specifically relating to that problem? Not a problem working here, just like anything that we can do to grow here.

Flor: Oh, okay. Okay. I guess that goes here then. Because that's our coaching. Right?

Kat: I guess. Just driving across town while trying to finish up our own plans and trying to... How does this [points at group again] all work?

Flor: So then we have a sustaining membership when team members are not as equity literate as other members. I think I saw somebody, something like that in here? Yeah.

Taylor: Well, I meant over here.

Flor: Oh, okay. Okay. All right. I'll just bring it back up there for now. Majority white team just talking about how they're not racist...

Taylor: Oh my God. [laughter]

Flor: Just explaining they aren't racist. Moving past just getting to know others. And I don't know who's this is.

Lani: Oh, that's mine.

Flor: Do you feel like it goes sort of in this clear roles? That seems a little bit separate. When team members are the ones who are leading in other... This is about time. So here's time. Sustainability - group being active when I'm not there. That's a coaching one.

Lani: I feel like that's more CRE.

Flor: CRE? Okay.
[...]

Flor: Balancing long-term actions while addressing in the moment stuff. These go together? Being strategic about what to address and...

Lani: Just like when moments come up, like randomly. Sometimes they're not… They take a whole meeting to address the one moment and just like I thought we needed to address the action plan… (CRE meeting, 3.8.19)

Even though the prompt was to identify problems of practice that RETs were facing, some coaches, like Kat, were expressing a desire to further define their role as coaches and develop the collective capacity of the CRE.

However, these conversations were often sidetracked by larger district level historical and contextual questions about the system (such as asking Charise how RETs were selected) and discussing broader district dynamics (like the differences between north end and south end schools). When the group re-focused on the task at hand, there was only 20 minutes left before Charise was releasing some of the coaches to go create a workshop that they would be presenting at the next racial equity institute. The immediacy of a Saturday Institute took precedence over these conceptual conversations about problems of practice facing RETs. They decided to tackle the "within RETs" strand of stickies and re-shuffle those into smaller themes:

Flor: So now we have four categories: scope of the work/how to move forward. team members knowledge AKA uneven knowledge; time problems; team dynamics, personality, and then there's the whiteness. Do we want to pick something that we feel that we can actually come to some action steps for? I don't know if all of them are equally as important, so advocate. Yes.

Dawn: Maybe the dynamics for... Because they lead to our handbook maybe?

Taylor: I was kind of thinking, I've played around with sort of maybe drafting something. So all this talk of creating a scope and sequence like beginning, middle and end of the school year. And I think maybe some of these things, maybe some of the dynamics would be captured in that? At beginning of the year here are things we should be thinking about

dynamics, middle of the year, and then there's end of the year where they should be with their equity knowledge. I don't know. Maybe working on building that tool might help, because then you can timeline that out. Whiteness… [laughter]

Lani: At the beginning, the middle and the end. For everyone.

Flor: And dynamics too, be aware of it. What are some of the pitfalls? Take a temperature every time you... Yeah, sure.

Charise: I like that idea. Putting that in the scope.

Flor: Okay. So we have 20 minutes. I'm hearing that we have a tool that you could develop? Is that enough time, can we get started?
(CRE meeting, 3.8.19)

I noticed in these sensemaking activities that coaches quickly gravitated to wanting solutions and action steps, and these action steps frequently involved a never-ending list of tools. This suggestion of creating a scope and sequence tool had come up several times in previous meetings but nothing had yet been created. They couldn't move all of these ideas forward at once, thus they defaulted to choosing the theme that best aligned with a tool they had previously asked for. They continued brainstorming what the scope and sequence should include such as developing group norms and leading a problems of practice discussion (similar to what they were collectively doing) to help focus teams on the highest priority concerns. They decided that they needed to create smaller tools to address specific RET challenges:

Flor: I wonder if we can write some action statements, like at the beginning of the year, do this, if that makes sense. And if that's going to change across the year. That I'm wondering, and so throw out ideas.

Taylor: When you were talking about this idea in the beginning, I was sort of thinking of it, like, what are the "to do's" and what are the resources or documents that we need?

Rita: Because I'm thinking for like team goal setting, it was hard to find something that fits specifically for the RET teams, like team goal setting versus individual goal setting. Because that's what most of those resources are individual, so if we have those to-do lists and resources and then this is

> some things that teams have used, and collection of those resources. These are different protocols. These are different…
>
> **Taylor**: And even if we're not with the teams to complete the document activity, maybe that's something you do before or after we're there. I'm not sure how it looks… (CRE meeting, 3.8.19)

Unfortunately, when the coaches sat down on their laptops to start drafting this shared document, they wound up getting lost in a tunnel of google folders and organizational questions: Where do I save this? Should we rename the folder? There's a tools folder but it is empty? We have too many things with the words scope and sequence! With their time up, Charise mentioned that she would capture what the coaches worked on and follow-up with next steps as they transitioned to the next portion of the agenda. While coaches were often deeply engaged in the conversations related to problems of practice and it was perhaps generative to de-silo their coaching experiences by identifying larger RET challenges, I observed conflicting priorities between solving RET issues, creating a laundry list of tools, and building internal CRE capacity.

In this way, the coaches were not able to find a scale of work that they could manageably complete in their collective time. And these ideas were rarely sustained across meetings. Even though coaches defaulted to suggesting the creation of new tools, these tools were largely unrealized.

Tools as an Attempt to Define Racial Equity Leadership and CRE

While there were several occurrences of tool-focused conversations within the CRE, the fixation on creating tools became an important mechanism to define themselves, as the CRE, and importantly, distinguish themselves from the district. For example, in my first CRE observation, members of the ED team joined the CRE meeting (I would later learn, this was a rare occurrence). ED staff member Nikki, a Black Indigenous woman, and Charise facilitated an

activity with the coaches to identify racial equity leadership core competencies, as both CRE and ED were attempting to develop racial equity leadership capacity in the district. They provided two tools, a leadership capacity checklist (Aguliar, 2016) and an education leadership competency framework developed by Microsoft[13]. Neither of the tools were specific to racial equity but were provided as a launching point to brainstorm how they could develop their own tool for racial equity leadership. In this activity, the purpose was to identify the core competencies for a racial equity leader with an eye towards how both CRE and ED coaches would define themselves and also bring new coaches into the work of racial equity leadership.

Similar to the scope and sequence activity coaches worked in pairs to brainstorm on sticky notes and organized those thematically into groups of: racial equity knowledge, community oriented, task driven, values driven, life-long learner, resistant and resilient (CRE meeting, 1.11.19). They had robust conversations around these topics and dove deeper into the racial equity knowledge category. They ended by beginning to map out what they thought it meant to be racial equity literate and develop a continuum with the intention that this would lead to a handbook, a super-tool that would contain all of their other tools (i.e., scope and sequence, RET tools, and CRE coaching tools).

In the following CRE meeting, the handbook came up again, to specifically onboard new coaches. As Charise describes, “what are some things you wish you knew or next coaches should know, should deal with. I'll give you some examples. What are we doing? What's our timeline? What's the time commitment? What's our focus? Like that sort of thing” (CRE Meeting, 3.8.19). Charise assigned a subgroup of coaches to work on the handbook and we started by looking at a handbook made by ED specifically for RETs. Surprisingly, Dawn was the only coach who knew

[13] https://www.microsoft.com/en-us/education/training-and-events/education-competencies

that this handbook for teams even existed. Even though ED and CRE were "partners," in coaching RETs, and the CRE logo was on the handbook, these CRE coaches were not aware of this resource that was presumably being provided to teams they were coaching. I asked Liz if CRE had created any of the tools or documents in the ED handbook and she responded, "Not that I'm aware of. Or if we did, I didn't see it here" (CRE Meeting, 3.8.19). They came to the conclusion that the ED handbook was specific for the "why and how" of RETs. What they needed was a version that was just for SEA Coaches.

Liz: Maybe it should be very centered on us, what would we want to know if we were doing a handbook? I would want to know that. What is my role? What am I being asked to do? The why versus the how. What do you think, Serena?

Serena: So this is after somebody has already been accepted to be a coach?

Liz: It sounds like it's an artifact that we can concretely show. This is what our coaches do. That's the sense I'm getting politically...

Serena: So we have to go backwards then, because I can ask that question but I don't have any of the answers. You've been coaching.

Liz: I only have a few more answers.

This conversation illuminated two key issues. First, the CRE coaches were attempting to define racial equity leadership "for themselves," implying that they recognized their work as being different from ED, even though they (both CRE and ED staff) served as RET coaches. And second, they were learning that creating these types of tools or artifacts was a way to validate their work "politically" by establishing themselves as racial equity leaders to a wider audience.

Liz, Serena, I spent the next 30 minutes trying to determine what needed to go into this SEA coaches handbook. But the short answer was: everything. They wanted it to have content, nuts and bolts, structure, tools for teams (like the scope and sequence), tools for coaches, history

of the CRE, how the CRE fits in with the district, roles and responsibilities of coaches, how to facilitate, how to build relationships, logistics, SEA contract language, district policy and procedures, and additional resources. We swirled around all these ideas, trying to determine what's a coaching skill? What content knowledge do you need? Where do you find the action plan? Is this us or the district? How do you keep the work moving forward? (CRE Meeting, 3.8.19). We abruptly ended when pizza arrived and closed our computers with a few notes in a google doc.

At one more meeting, that google doc became a very rough sketch of a "table of contents" where coaches began to just name the various pieces that needed to eventually go in this handbook (5.31.19). But at this point it was the last CRE meeting of the school year, the energy in the room was low and focus was dwindling. The handbook became a project that was referenced again at future meetings, but no more collective time was spent to actually create this tool. The point was to create an artifact, a manual, that says "this is who we are and what we do" but that proved to be difficult when coaches weren't sure what they were always doing and were suggesting the use of tools that were yet to be fully developed.

Ultimately, coaches spent a considerable amount of time in meetings trying to define racial equity leadership and their role as leaders. Creating tools such as a scope and sequence or a handbook were all ways to concretize a set of ideas and practices that they could collectively own and champion. Coaching was the object that had opened a new pathway to systems leadership in the district and had been formalized in the collective bargaining agreement. But coaching was an arduous task with competing priorities, not enough time, and an unclear role boundary with ED. Coaches engaged in generative discussions and processing activities, identifying complex challenges, sharing knowledge and strategies, and reflecting on their work.

However, continuity and capacity were in short supply. As I describe later in this chapter, there were always immediate needs to address that detracted from their ability to spend the sustained amount of time and energy needed to move their collective wisdom into the creation of products, tools, and tangible support for themselves and their teams. Nevertheless, being part of the CRE space was still helping leaders grow and shape their coaching practice, even if it never fully came to fruition as the "tools" coaches desired. However, coaching itself was quickly becoming secondary to a new goal of the CRE and a new avenue for district-level leadership.

Professional Development: Expanding CRE's Role in District Leadership

Importantly, the year of my data collection marked a critical shift for the CRE moving from exclusively coaching RETs to the development and implementation of trainings and workshops for educators. Similar to the impetus for starting the coaches program, the CRE took up the charge of creating professional development to fill a perceived need of educators that the district was not providing. In this case, they were responding to the dearth of quality equity trainings that were both meaningful and actionable.

Flor and Kat were two of the first coaches to provide a workshop at a district-wide Saturday Institute. In talking about the work of the CRE, Flor explains,

> It started off mostly as coaching the new teams. And then, towards the end, Kat and I... It was actually Kat who initiated this idea, of creating a workshop at one of the institutes, about being an ally. What is it? And it's called, "Bad Allies," right. And then, we got the taste for that, and that's, I think, what sent us in that direction after that, because we showed that we could do it, and that we... Not only that we could do it, but that part of doing it was understanding what it was that teachers needed, or educators needed and wanted. (Flor Interview, 12.2.19)

In Flor's eyes the workshop was powerful because two women of color educators were empowered to lead district level work. She continues,

Flor: Well, I think what was really cool was right after Kat and I did that

> first workshop, I seem to feel like the morale went up with the team that I was coaching, and other coaches had expressed that same observation, like, "Ooh, we saw ourselves in you because you had presented in front of everybody."
>
> **Aditi**: That felt good?
>
> **Flor**: Yeah.
>
> **Aditi**: Some momentum, maybe?
>
> **Flor**: Right. And I think that directly led to ED handing us more power to do the other workshops.

Flor and Kat were modeling educator-driven professional development and educators were loving it. Consequently, the one-off workshop sparked something much bigger than anyone imagined. For the CRE coaches, they knew that they had the knowledge and expertise to create better professional development than the district and to Charise, it was a strategic opportunity to occupy traditionally district turf and provided another avenue to elevate coaches as systems-level equity leadership.

Behind the scenes, Charise strategized with her allies, Marta (Ethnic Studies) and Wendy (Culturally Responsive Teaching Cadre), to create scaffolded workshops centering educator expertise into the Saturday institutes. Marta and Wendy were both district administrators with whom Charise had a close working relationship and Wendy was responsible for all professional development in the district. Marta had already begun crafting an ethnic studies series and Wendy was working on a set of workshops on culturally responsive teaching. Building on what the coaches had previously discussed, Charise sketched a four-part series mapped to the equity literacy framework, the foundational framework for the CRE, focusing on the components of recognize, respond, redress, create and sustain (Gorski, 2016). The racial equity literacy series,

ethnic studies series, and culturally responsive teaching series would complement each other towards building the racial equity capacity of educators in the district.

CRE coaches worked in pairs or trios to build a workshop around one of the four equity literacy framework themes and took turns presenting these trainings during designated Saturday institutes. Developing and facilitating these workshops gave coaches another meaningful role in the leadership of RETs with greater visibility in the district. During the end of year/back to school CRE retreat, Taylor reflected on the power of these professional development sessions as a key transformative moment.

> **Taylor**: I mean, I was just sort of reflecting on a couple of moments, either listening to people's presentations or being someone who is participating and delivering it. I just feel like that was such a good... I mean, it was a lot of work and felt really tiring, but I think that's what the teams needed. And I heard people saying in the educator led PDs, they were like, "This was the first one in the whole Saturday series that felt useful." Or like, "This one actually made sense. I'm walking away with something I can go use with my team. I'm so excited." Direct quotes and phrases of gratitude and appreciation. I just think that that's totally missing, or it was missing, and I forget what the question of this was.
>
> **Charise**: It was just, what were some moments that took you from before to now?
>
> **Taylor**: Yeah. Yeah, so I think in reflection, those were moments that felt really… Watching people in this room lead or hearing the feedback, it was like, oh yeah, this is pushing teams and individuals toward something useful. (CRE Retreat, 8.12.19)

Other coaches also named the role in professional development as a significant and meaningful experience. For example, Kat expressed gratitude to be able to create and collaborate with other coaches and found “partnership in designing the workshops” (Kat Interview, 8.27.19). It was a way to engage in deep intellectual work, capitalizing on their knowledge of schools and teams, and operationalizing a racial equity framework responsive to educators.

What they did not expect was how popular their workshops would be and the cascading effects of their success. While they did use some time during CRE meetings to break off in teams and design these workshops, the coaches were largely working outside of their "paid" hours of already being a classroom educator and their coaching responsibilities. Not only had the district begun asking the CRE to keep offering their workshops during the Institutes, individual educators and school administrators were requesting that the CRE present their workshops during Wednesday professional development days and other designated learning times so that all school staff, not just RETs, could benefit from the training. During a CRE meeting Charise narrated this progression to the coaches:

Charise: So the Center for Racial Equity is our racial equity coaches program, which used to be called Partners, initially started as leadership development support for both the coaches, so y'all, and supporting the racial equity teams.

Priya: Okay.

Charise: Okay. Part of that development, strategically to position ourselves in the district meant that we also created content, that was the workshops. But when that started, it came out of necessity, because the district sucked.

Priya: Okay, yeah.

Charise: Right.

Liz: Not past tense [Kat laughing]. When it comes to this work.

Charise: Yeah. District sucks. But it was our response to that, and we created content for it.

Priya: Got it. And that was part of the-

Charise: But because we were so good at it, we created more content, and then because we were so good at that, we then offered it outside of Saturday institutes.

With already limited capacity, the influx of PD requests quickly became overwhelming. While the district was providing their own PD, schools were specifically asking for the CRE workshops. More and more time in the CRE meeting space became dedicated to the planning and logistics of these trainings, sometimes with multiple schools requesting a workshop at the same day and time. As Charise explained, "The district doesn't have the policy, political will, or interest to provide what the schools are asking for. It's against our values to say no just because we don't have a system yet. We are responding. It's just ass backwards" (CRE Meeting, 1.11.19). Even though Charise bore the brunt of the burden fielding dozens of school requests, coaches expressed feeling the stress of the late-night text threads and last-minute asks that felt "unprofessional" and that they "didn't know what was even going on anymore" (CRE Meeting, 11.6.19). They had created trainings that they were the only ones equipped to facilitate.

Charise recognized this growing concern and attempted to use the collective brain power of the coaches to create a system to both respond to the needs of educators and honor the work of coaches. For example, during one of the CRE meetings she split the coaches into two groups with one group prioritizing the training issue and the future of their role in professional development. She invited interested coaches to join that conversation:

> **Charise**: And what that conversation is, it's just what are we doing? What are we creating? What is this future of work? Right? We know that educators are the content creators for this work and how they should be. We have had the opportunity to create it within CRE. You all are the ones who have created it and it's great work. So therefore you should be creating the systems and making sense of what it means to really honor educators, time and energy.
>
> We do not have a model. So just like a lot of things that are new in movements and startups it's us that is creating it. So that's what that conversation is. What is it? What are we doing to be able to meet the needs of people who are asking for these types of trainings that up to this point we've created?

Flor: Is there also room to talk about the kinds of trainings we think they need to have? Verses what they are asking for?

Charise: Sure, Yeah, but I would really prefer given the time we focused on what that system is, because ultimately we'll need a separate program. That's similar to a train the trainer, but way more in depth than that. Which will not be coaches, although coaches can be part of it, you know? So there's a whole other thing happening.

These conversations of "needing a system" consistently came up in the CRE meetings and remained largely unresolved. Charise did mention that Wendy had created a form for schools to request PD and assist with scheduling, but it did not solve the capacity issue of just not having enough educators available to provide the training. In my conversations with coaches at the end of the school year, they were exhausted and just spread too thin. As Taylor described it, they were all "dry ass bagels with not enough shmear" (Interview, 11.21.19).

Growing pains: Conflicting objects and conceptual tensions

All of the coaches agreed that educators needed meaningful professional development and that CRE coaches were creating powerful content. However, not everyone thought professional development should be the purpose of the CRE. Particularly if it came at the expense of their original goal of coaching. As Taylor recounted,

> The first year I felt it was mostly about coaching and then people wanted to get their foot in the door for those Saturday trainings. People were really vocal. They were like, "We need to have a say in what the trainings are." The district ones sucked. I agree with that. I don't disagree; however, it became a focus to the detriment of coaching. (Interview, 11.21.19)

Similarly, Liz discussed this shift in CRE priorities,

> I was asking initially, I was like "Okay we've got this great book [Art of Coaching Teams] you gave us, thanks for finding it." And I haven't read it front to back but I'm just like, these are good little gems, let's talk about these. It would be addressed but I think what was so pressing, what's been so pressing is the immediate tasks. And things need to be rolled out and happen, I think that definitely was my feeling too, of that [coaching] was secondary. And not because of any intent, it just happened because of the nature of

> the work. But it remains a desire for me, I'd love for it to be an opportunity to really develop those skills for myself. (Interview, 10.29.19)

Both Taylor and Liz highlighted the role of the shifting landscape in the district and how those forces were shaping their CRE work. While some coaches welcomed the new professional development role, others were explicit that it was not what they had come to the CRE to do and they did not have the energy to do it. For example, Serena vented about all the confusion,

> **Serena**: Then now we're doing all of these trainings and I didn't know that, that's what we were doing. I want to coach. I want to work one on one with people. I don't want to lead PDs with people I don't know yet. I mean, if I've planned it that's one thing. Now we have these canned, not canned, but we have these pre-prepared slides that people on our teams have worked on, which is like quality work and we are getting asked all the time to step out of our buildings and to go deliver this professional development at the last minute. I'm like, are we getting paid for this? Are we getting subs for this? Do we have coverage? What are we doing? I think that that's really rough. You cannot be asking educators who are doing this in addition to their regular jobs to lead PDs with less than a day's notice. That's insane.
>
> **Aditi**: Why do you think it's happening like that?
>
> **Serena**: I think people, they really liked the content that's been created by these educators. We now have these eight professional development, racial equity days on the calendar and I think people are scrambling. I think they're like, oh, well, we have to do this work now and oh, well, here's the center of racial equity and we'll just ask them. I think that that is cool in theory, but I think the way that it's played out is really rushed and it weighs heavy on the people who are organizing it[14].

Serena echoed many of the frustrations felt by other coaches regarding the lack of capacity, structure, and compensation for the additional professional development work as well as voicing her concern about the program itself diverging from her motivation to be a racial equity leader. Towards the end of my year of observations, the CRE was fairly equally divided between

[14] Four women of color educators were on medical leave due to stress and racism

coaches who wanted to coach and coaches who wanted to provide professional development, recognizing that doing both was impossible and unsustainable. However, this tension was broader than the inherent capacity issue, they were grappling with questions of identity, expertise, role, and leadership aspirations. There continued to be conversations of the CRE splitting into two programs to best align with the interests and priorities of these educators responsible for implementation of both the equity initiatives.

Resisting Replicating the District: Professional Development as an Equity-Driven Process

Serena's critique of the "canned" PD also reveals an important conceptual tension that was emerging around the role of professional development in racial equity work. Even though she recognizes that the coaches are creating high quality workshops, she is pointing to the idea that something gets lost when things become standardized, extracted from its original creator, and simply delivered. I heard countless times from the educators that the district PDs were "recycled" and the same-old training year after year. The strength of the CRE trainings and the original "Bad Allies" training was that they were created collaboratively by educators in touch with their school communities and responsive to the feedback from RETs. They were the equity literate experts co-facilitating the workshops that they had designed themselves, for themselves, to present in particular contexts. For example, Flor starts to raise this issue during a CRE meeting:

> And I don't know if this is, sorry if this is not the time. There's also, for me, in two days, when I facilitate racial equity 101, that's the hybrid. I've worked on adding a few things that I need personally to put into that space. In order for me to deal with the fact that it's going to be a mostly white audience. So there's this…I'm concerned about issues of calibrating because we're all doing these workshops now and I've already added content that's particular to what I need. So I want to be sensitive to preserving what the essential learning we want and let people know that there is a version that is the one that I have made for my needs out there. That's all. (CRE Observation, 9.23.19)

Flor's statement is bigger than just clearly labeling slides. Earlier in the meeting she pushed back on a train-the-trainer suggestion to pair a coach with a new leader to scaffold their ability to train by first observing, then facilitating a portion of the training, to eventually leading the training. Flor liked the idea but wanted to preserve their original collaborative co-facilitation model, even though she knew that they "were strapped." These CRE leaders were a limited resource. The content could be great, but the who and how mattered. Even with Charise actively looking to recruit equity literate educators, "so that we can get some people in who might be able to effectively deliver the content that you've created" (CRE meeting, 9.23.19). But just having teachers "deliver" the professional development didn't get to the heart of CRE's district critique. After all, ED leaders like Ben, Nikki, and Leah were former teachers. The CRE was putting forth a bottom-up systems-level theory of change that centered educator expertise and needs over top-down district priorities. CRE coaches were in the school communities and could be more responsive to the challenges educators, like them, were facing. And it was important that they center the voices and experiences of leaders of color in the work.

I think framing the professional development conundrum as simply a "capacity" issue might have obscured some of the larger concerns of Coaches that were emerging in the CRE leadership space. Part of the work as racial equity leaders was creating and facilitating their own content, based in their identities and experiences as educators of color, and in community with each other. Consequently, all the solutions that Charise and the coaches brainstormed to address the identified capacity problem such as train-the-trainer models, videotaping workshops, and creating template slide decks of PD did not disrupt that district logic theory of change because it was not rooted in a collaborative, relationship driven process. Without this process, the CRE was

in danger of replicating the “canned” and out of touch district system that they were attempting to resist.

The Role of Professional Development in Racial Equity Leadership

The CRE coaches' expanded role into professional development surfaced another important tension regarding PD as the primary response to addressing racial disparities in schools. In particular, the CRE was expanding their district-level influence and taking up a traditionally district role, but they also questioned the utility of PD in equity-focused change. Specifically coaches critiqued RETs and schools overreliance on PDs as the checkbox or “fix” for inequities. The RET survey[15] had named professional development as the main activity of RETs and the ED team had been separately discussing strategies to move teams into action (CRE meeting, 3.29.19). Nikki brought this concern to the CRE meeting in a larger conversation on creating a cycle of inquiry tool. Liz responded to Nikki’s call to reach for something beyond PD. As Liz reacts,

> It's probably not by accident, but we default to what PD will be delivered. Like it's PD, PD, PD, and your question of how do we disrupt other parts of the system, I really like that is the challenge, I wonder, and if we, this can be a part of the discussion, is the involvement of administration and how they support and get in the way. So how do you help the team navigate that? Because that's challenging. That's tricky. (CRE meeting, 3.29.19)

Providing PD had become the institutional response and in some ways, an evasive maneuver, of both RETs and school administration. Coaches (and ED) wanted to push teams to get to the core of teaching, learning, practices, and policies, to disrupt and find ways to bring racial equity into the daily work of schools instead of a one-off PD. The goal of PD should be to motivate movement and change. What would educators do with their new understanding? Doing a

[15] https://www.education.uw.edu/pre/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/RET-Survey-Report-2017.pdf

workshop was fine, but that workshop needed to be tailored to a specific, identified need (with evidence) of the school community, and be applicable to the on-going work of educators. Coaches felt that the dominant models of PD were not actionable and didn't provide educators with concrete next steps to implement in their work. Rita and Flor talk about this dilemma in the context of coaching their RETs,

> **Rita**: And I think in those first years, I feel like all racial equity teams Focused on was only PD to staff. So, I think that it got really stuck there because one off PDs don't make, to be honest, I don't feel like really make a difference. Maybe they make slight differences, and I don't want to disvalue what that is, but it's hard to get real lasting change if you do two PDs in a year.
>
> **Flor**: That's right.
>
> **Rita**: We didn't ever get to really looking at the heart of our practices and changing actual school practices or changing things.
>
> **Flor**: So can I jump in? That's kind of where I've been going with this model that I've been pushing at Van Asselt. So, with the Black Lives Matter at School week and recently with that family engagement thing is like ... So a different way that the racial equity team can function, outside of professional development, is helping steward the staff or support the staff through putting a racial equity lens on what they're already doing. It's possible to do a survey type of overview thing at the beginning of the year. I think would be good. But then take everyday practice, everyday things that teachers have to do anyway like teaching literacy or mathematics and make the time and space available for them to now do it in a culturally responsive way or looking at it through an ethic studies lens. (CRE meeting, 3.29.19)

In this excerpt, Flor is putting forth a different role and vision of the RETs beyond PD. She is attempting to shift the everyday practices of educators, applying a critical lens to their daily activities, thus embedding racial equity in their practice as opposed to trying to make it "applicable" to practice.

The PD conversations brought up interesting complexities to the work. It wasn't as simple as saying PD is bad or unnecessary, there was always nuance and understanding that

professional development does have an important place in racial equity work, particularly in building knowledge and fluency. Serena's question pushes on this idea,

> **Serena**: Can I ask you a question? When people are talking about, "PDs don't make an impact", can you say more about PDs don't make an impact? Can you explain more about what kind of PDs? Because you all know my only frame of reference is [school name]. So when we say PD at [school], that includes when we brought in Robin DiAngelo. That includes when we have trained our staff on implicit bias and whatever it is that our team has said like, "This will get us further." If it's serving staff and sharing those survey results, or students, or whomever.
>
> **Charise**: Here's your quick answer. A PD that is responding to an actual custom need, the first time could change things. The second and third time we've done implicit bias, that's not going to change anything. Or choosing what PD a group needs without asking them, without context for what they need is also not going to change things. That's the difference. How many times have you done an implicit bias in the district?
>
> Now, it's just become a check, check, check, check, check ... even if it means it is good. So PD is good when there's an actual need that's being met, and it's contextually based in that workshop and not just something that'll be generic. So that's why when Flor and Kat came up with the Bad Allies training, people were like, "Oh, my God, that's so great," because that was exactly what they had been asking for. Now, if that's all they deliver every single time … (CRE meeting, 5.31.19)

Charise's response again highlights the importance of PD being responsive and specific to the needs of educators and schools. The professional development quandary was a yes/and situation. We need good PD and what is next? How do we ensure that we do not make racial equity synonymous with PD? How will we move from theory to practice? And to Flor's point above, how do we embed theory in our practice?

This conceptual tension around the role of professional development in racial equity leadership had important implications for the work of the CRE coaches. What does it mean to focus on creating and providing professional development when that may not be in alignment with their visions of racial equity leadership? The conversations were layered and entangled with

additional dynamics of race, gender, and notions of expertise. The following discussion illuminates some of this dissonance and nuance:

Dawn: A lot of people really want PD. That's a need. Wherever it comes from, but that's the need, is the delivering PD from professionals.

Hana: Teachers think PD will fix everything then. A lot of teachers get caught up in the PD. We can't solve what we don't know, so if you just tell us what we need to know, and then we can, and then it's not... It often doesn't produce the results that-

Flor: They think it's going to.

Hana: Yeah.

Liz: But I agree. It is what we're asked a lot.

Hana: It is.

Liz: I think it's this, chicken or egg, right? But it's what we know. What's interesting is with staff though, when my racial equity team has presented, we got feedback and some of it was about bringing in experts. So you're saying if I was not in your school typically, but I'm a teacher, but I came from somewhere else, then I'm an expert?

Dawn: It's a microaggression.

Flor: Familiarity breeds contempt?

Charise: No, there's a name for it. It's not specific to people of color. There's a phrase for it... It's exactly that. When you are in your own school they don't listen.

Kat: They quoted [name] at [school] to say the same fucking thing I say every day.

Dawn: But he is a white male.

Hana: It's a little bit of it's somehow related to like colonization. It's somehow about like the expertise of the outsider.

Dawn: Especially a woman.

[...]

Rita: And then I guess the other thing I'm having a hard time with is holding and knowing all of this, that PD is not going to fix it, but then that's what the requests we're getting is. And so I don't necessarily know what to tell the team to be like, "No, you need to also be thinking about things." It feels also bad to just say no to these requests, which is hard.

> **Charise**: Some people recognize that PD has sucked. Ours don't. PD cannot solve stuff. The training, if it's quality and facilitated well appropriately practiced can move into the next phase, but they would then need facilitated coaching to then continue that work.

Moving into the professional development space created this conundrum of women of color educators finally being positioned as experts but also wanting to push back on this notion of inviting experts, particularly those from outside the school community, to "solve" racial equity issues. Creating and delivering PD had opened a new door into district leadership. They now had greater influence in the system, but were they actually disrupting the system or just perpetuating it?

The consensus appeared to be that racial equity work needed both the training and the individualized support. But the question of how to make that happen still remained. With the already significant capacity concerns and skepticism of professional development as a central theory of change in racial equity, the question of "but is it worth our time" (Lani Interview, 12.2.19) lingered.

Learning the system as a Core Leadership Activity

Amidst all the equity activity happening in the CRE, I found that the largest percentage of time during meetings was spent "learning the system." The CRE was a powerful space for the coaches to ground their work in a historical context, develop a shared critique, strategize their role in navigating a complex, racist system, and ultimately articulate a new vision of educator-driven racial equity leadership.

All of the coaches were acutely aware of the multiple forms of racism in the district, however as discussed in the previous chapter, their experiences were largely tied to their own classrooms and schools. Gathering together each meeting provided the opportunity to share

experiences across schools, bringing a larger understanding of the district environment, particularly for educators of color. For example, when Lani shared that she had been displaced from her school, it spurred a conversation among the coaches of how many other young educators of color they each knew who had faced displacement (CRE meeting, 3.8.19). The CRE goal of "de-siloing" educator equity work also included de-siloing these racialized dynamics. Lani's individual experience of "school budget cuts" became a collective critique on the recruitment and retention of teachers of color in the district. As she shared in our interview, the CRE became a place to "take off those rose-colored glasses and look behind the curtain" (Lani Interview, 12.2.19).

Drawing on Critical Historicity to Learn the District

Engagement in the CRE was a unique socialization process into the inner-workings of systems-level leadership. While some of the veteran educators like Flor and Liz have had their fair share of experiencing the shifting tides of the district, and others like Lani and Taylor sit on the SEA board, for most of the CRE coaches, Charise was the primary source and closest access point to district level knowledge. Specifically, Charise brought the context and history of previous attempts at racial equity partnership and how that history shapes current politics and processes. Throughout my observations, Charise explicitly illuminated two foundational stances: 1) the district will continue to re-instantiate its power and 2) there is no safety or security in racial equity work.

Racialized Organizational Dynamics: "Re-whitening" and "Course-Correction"

A common narrative in the CRE space was how educators of color are the grassroots leaders of racial equity work, and that the district is constantly trying to undermine the work and reify their power. Meaning, every time educators make progress on an issue, the district acts as

an opposing force trying to maintain the status quo. Charise calls this "re-whitening" and "course correction."

While a district critique was present in all the CRE meetings, this specific framing of "re-whitening" and "course correction" became particularly pronounced as the union approached bargaining. It was especially a theme of the CRE/CRT combined retreat that occurred just a few weeks before bargaining began and the start of a new school year. The space was co-facilitated by Charise and Wendy with Wendy acknowledging how they all came together and how "the work is a moving target and always under threat" (CRE Retreat, 8.12.19). She named how there was a new superintendent and district leaders with new ideas and an initiative to implement a series of foundational coursework that would be required for all new teachers. Even though the foundational coursework was intended to be equity-based, the team developing the coursework did not have many teachers of color and the curriculum was not aligned with all the other equity efforts already happening in the district. Wendy expressed that part of her charge was to bring in folks from this team to "inform, advise, revise, and shape" the foundational coursework, to build off of what educators of color have already done and not "here's a brand-new thing that just appeared" (CRE meeting, 8.12.19). Charise jumped in to provide the "big picture" and highlight this move as a prime example of the institutional course correction:

> **Charise**: So, some of you have heard me go on my little bit of rant about course correction, which is a phrase used about how to, I'm going to make up a word, re-white things. Okay. So when I first started, actually I was not in this position, I was a classroom teacher, and I was part of the very first year of PAR[16]. And I was there for three years, peer assistant review. That is ...
>
> **Wendy**: Another big district initiative.

[16] Peer Assistance Review, a district-union partnership for teacher evaluation

Charise: Yeah. But that is the catalyst to the, what's it called, the foundational courses. That was the catalyst to... but that became a bigger issue… Anyways, I was there for three years and then I got written out of it. [Wendy whispers "me too"]

Mmmhmm. Matter of fact, they were having a meeting in the office and Liz was like, where are you at? I'm like what are you talking about, I'm in my office. She is like, we're having a meeting in the conference room. And I'm like what do you mean. And she's like no we're meeting right now in the conference room… that's how I found out I'm no longer involved, three years later.

But what it tells me, and this is like the bigger picture, and this is what I need everyone to be constantly aware of, because this is the course correction. So everything we're doing, everything that's successful is always under threat for course correction.

And that phrase I'm using means, and that's why I made up the re-whitening, is how do we make sure that it actually doesn't? So this whole foundational coursework, this whole foundational coursework under equity initially came from a huge push to make sure that whatever we're doing is racial equity. Cool. So with the foundational work, we talked to a foundational coursework person, we made sure that we included a chapter, we made sure that we equity in it and then I was written out of it. And it's not about me, but I'm saying like, that's part of how this works.

So, if we're not constantly aware of how all of this like wonderful successes we're having, and we are, this amazing stuff that's changed over the last few years. And it's because a lot of the pushes of those of us in this room and we'll continue because of those of us in this room. But if we're not aware that these things are always like being…

Educator: Re-appropriated?

Charise: Re-appropriated, but also I mean re-whitened. Right? Then it gets, and then we get tired, right? So I just want to put that out because that's part of what's happening here. And so I will also then add, I'll have to make up a new word, but de-whiten it? Something like that. So it happened, but now we're trying to take it back, make sure it still stays as right as it was when we first initiated it. That's the constant battle.

In that moment, Charise was narrating a critical historicity of the origins of this district equity initiative and centering the educators of color that have been erased from the work. She was asking the group to hold the importance of these origins and stay vigilant amidst all the threats.

To the coaches, she was a window into spaces that these educator leaders may one day occupy, and they needed to be aware and prepared. Liz jumped in to share that the district leaders on the PAR team claimed that removing Charise was “unintentional” but “how could that happen accidentally?” “Those moves are happening all the time in different rooms and places of power… it’s continuous, we have to continue to call it out because it’s all being re-whited, I love that word” (Liz, CRE meeting, 8.12.19). Throughout the retreat there were more examples of this “course correction” including Marta being excluded from ethnic studies curriculum and how the ethnic studies work itself was being co-opted and re-whitened by the district now that it was officially under their purview.

Revolving Door of District Leaders

Learning the system also entailed understanding who the key players and decision-makers were in the district. A task that was never clear given the constant turmoil and turnover. Almost every meeting Charise had an update about who was moving up, leaving, or taking on new roles. During the retreat one of the coaches asked if they could be given an organization chart of the hierarchy to which Charise responded that there wasn’t one because, “every time you ask for an org chart it’s already old” (8.12.19). This revolving door of district leaders brought particular instability to the work of the CRE as the CRE was contractually expected to “partner” with ED. Thus, whomever came into the new ED role would have a significant impact on their collective work. Charise frequently recounted the challenges of the endless district turnover how the CRE stepped up into leadership because the district had failed. As she described, “this is where coaches were sparked, because ED was down to one person who couldn't do it and then coaches was like, "We'll create the program to try to sustain something” (CRE meeting, 5.31.19).

Just since the inception of the CRE, Charise had "partnered" with 5 different people from the district, with varying levels of success (which will be discussed more in the next chapter). Each time it was a new relationship, new dynamics, and a new person to teach about the work. The activity system of the CRE was constantly being shaped by the conditions of the district and the revolving door of community impacted the roles, goals, and rules of the CRE leadership activity. That instability brought an undercurrent of anxiety, that everything could change quickly, and continued to reinforce the message that the district could not be relied upon.

It Could All Go Away: Learning the Role of Positional Power in Racial Equity Initiatives

Within the CRE, the coaches developed a shared critique of the district and the barriers they constructed against equity-focused systems change. In addition to the speed of change and instability of the district, another important learning was the role of the superintendent and how individuals with power in the system could make the racial equity work obsolete. It was more than just deprioritizing the work; the district could just say it was no longer necessary. This fear of the fickle nature and whims of the district were not unfounded as there had been ample precedent of equity initiatives coming and going, such as Courageous Conversations (Liz Interview, 10.29.19) as well as a former superintendent disbanding a previous iteration of ED, leaving the district without an equity department for five years (CRE Meeting, 5.31.19). This worry was amplified by a new superintendent, a Native woman who, like most superintendents, had her own vision and plan, which usually came with a staffing shake up and re-organization.

As the Director of the CRE, Charise had become privy to a new set of district conversations with the superintendent and executive leadership. Gaining access to this exclusive place of power was a win for the CRE, as Charise brought her analysis and insights into these systems-level, decision-making spaces. However, Charise was also bringing her insights through

narrating her experiences, interactions, and intricacies of district policies back to the CRE. I felt there was a sense of Charise wanting to teach the coaches to be vigilant in their suspicion of the district, and not be fooled by their attempts at equity. For example, Charise described the superintendent as “not equity literate” and a “systemic barrier” to the work (CRE meeting, 3.29.19). The district had hired a woman of color as superintendent, but Charise questioned if it was anything more than optics.

Charise: And for instance, one of the wins that I'm... Now I have my meetings with [the superintendent] and with the SEA leadership. And just the level of hypocrisy and the weight of that is just-

Liz: Coming directly from the board, or her?

Charise: Well, it's more so what she brings to almost actively maintain the system that almost was kind of changing.

Kat: Which seems to be more of this, some of the structures that even if people of color get in that space, it's like, "Well, we got to maintain that power."

Liz: Mm-hmm (affirmative). It's like a rage against the machine.
(CRE meeting, 3.29.19)

In Charise’s analysis, the superintendent was not only part of the machine, she was leading the district machine. And that machine was a serious threat to the CRE and their vision of racial equity leadership in the district. Charise on a couple occasions shared with coaches her worries about the language the superintendent was using regarding racial equity and how it harkened back to the days pre-ED. As Charise explains,

Charise: And [the superintendent] wondered why we even have it [ED] anymore when we
are all doing racial equity anyway.

Kat: What?

Liz: Wow.

Kat: Wait, what?

Charise: She was like, "We have racial equity work in all of our conversations

> now. Every department's doing racial equity work. We have racial equity in our strategic plan. We have these racial equity institutes. We have this advisory student board with all the racial equity students on it talking about 0030."
>
> She's setting up these like, "We're doing everything. Do we still really need a ED?" Because of course, if we cut that, that's a huge chunk in your budget that you get back. That's what they did to Caprice Collins, that's why we didn't have a department for five years. It was Bernardo that came to the department.

Liz: And hers was smaller.

Charise: So she [superintendent] has already asked that question.

Hana: Maybe we can talk about that when we actually get the results of racial equity, instead of that we're doing all the work, so let's not do the work anymore. What does that even mean? We're already doing all the work. Let's not do the work anymore. What? (CRE meeting, 5.31.19)

These conversations were eye opening for the coaches and highlight the key role Charise played in this district leadership socialization process. There was always something bigger going on, they could not trust the system, and there were infinite threats to their work. I observed the CRE as an important processing space for coaches to develop a shared critique and understanding the realities of racial equity leadership and organizational change.

Infiltrating and Co-opting Places of Power as a Theory of Systems Change

The CRE coaches building their knowledge of the system lead to strategizing how to infiltrate the system. Specifically, I heard frequent questions of how they could better utilize existing structures or figure out where decisions were being made. For example, they worked to identify key leadership spaces that could be beneficial to furthering their influence. Charise was explicit about this goal during their retreat.

> So one of the things we'll be talking about is what are the leadership spaces that we occupy? How do we, as a community, as a collective, intervene in those spaces for change? How do understand what's going on in those spaces and call it out so that we can get something different to happen, right? (CRE retreat, 8.12.19).

In addition, they talked about repurposing existing structures towards their work such as trying to shift district policy so contract professional development days could be used for RET planning and professional development (CRE meeting, 3.29.19). The coaches were enacting a theory of change that relied on co-opting the existing places of power towards racial equity transformation.

It was about proliferating their racial equity analysis and also about individual, equity literate leaders agitating to disrupt the status quo. I recognized this theory of change embedded in the collective bargaining agreement that at least one member of the Building Leadership Team be on the Racial Equity Team so that RET work could influence important decision-making such as school budgeting and evaluation processes.

But a theory of change that prioritized an individual infiltrating the system as a boundary spanner created questions of sustainability. Several coaches named being exhausted, on every committee, and that it was the "same brown person having to go to another meeting" (Liz Interview, 10.29.19). I heard coaches lament the extra burden that often fell heaviest on young staff of color and wanting the work to be institutionalized and not reliant on defaulting to one already overworked person (CRE meeting, 3.29.19).

However, the CRE strategy of getting our people in the right places fundamentally was a question of trust. The CRE coaches trusted each other as educators of color with the capacity and expertise to hold the complexity of their profession and lead racial equity focused systems change. The CRE was cultivating a kind of racial equity leadership centered on relationships, community, and solidarity.

Visioning Racial Equity Leadership as Creating the Well

The CRE was ultimately an investment in people and relationships. Charise seeded the space by bringing this particular group of educators of color together, to build a space for racial affinity,

leadership, and solidarity. But it was more than de-siloing educators, those initial intentions were not enough, they needed to be practiced, maintained, and sustained. Every CRE meeting had a loose agenda of connection, content, and creation, a vision of racial equity leadership put forth by Charise. While they always attempted to do all three, coaches consistently named the connection to each other as the most incredible, healing, and transformative outcome of their leadership activity. I saw it at the beginning of every meeting, circle sharing of acts of resistance, resilience, joy, and struggle. The understanding that "we are not alone" and that they "are the people that make CRE happen" (CRE meeting, 1.11.19). They saw each other as leaders, recognizing and affirming their labor, like when they took time to each share how they lead Black Lives Matter content at their individual school (CRE meeting, 3.8.19). I saw Charise frequently trying to wrangle everyone to a task when coaches were chatting, swearing, laughing, and crying.

In the final section of this chapter I describe the love of the CRE, a palpable feeling in the room, that these people really liked each other, they cared for each other, and they counted on each other. As the coaches expressed, it was the relations between them that made the CRE truly special. The CRE became a place to put forth a vision of racial equity leadership grounded in community, care, and trust.

Racism Makes Us Sick: Collective Experiences of a Racialized System

The coaches did not need the CRE to know the damaging impacts of being a woman of color, leader, in a racist system. They all mentioned the microaggressions, fatigue of convincing white people racism is real, the burnout, the mental, physical, and emotional harm. It was "coded in their bodies" (Flor, 5.31.19). The CRE did however bring all of those individual racialized experiences into a collective space, to see and feel the systemic ills of white supremacy as it

impacted their cadre of leaders. During all of my interviews the coaches brought up how many women of color were on medical leave (four during the time of my study), system-wide information they may not have had access to unless they were in these conversations together.

Being a part of the CRE gave coaches a unique vantage point to understand their own experiences in a larger context, and to witness how the system was impacting each other, and personally harming Charise, as a black woman educator leader. Towards the end of the school year we all started observing how distressed Charise had become and the damage the system was causing. During an RET Saturday institute I sat with Charise as she was crying in the corner. She was clearly unwell. At the next CRE meeting Charise brought the coaches into this experience:

Charise: So I don't know if you noticed, but I'm clearly not all there. Right? I've been suffering from I don't know what for the last week or so and I'm starting crying about it.

Liz: Take your time.

Charise: The hardest part is just not being able to articulate anything and losing track of what I'm trying to say.

Liz: And you can tell us.

Charise: I don't actually know what it is. And a lot of me started with the theory that it's basically psychosomatic responses to stress, but it got kind of scary, last couple of days, like alternating between like hot flashes and chills and stomach pain and all kinds of weird, weird stuff. Losing train of thought while I'm speaking. So that in of itself was scary because if I'm having a psychosomatic response to stress... Someone the other day was like, "I'm becoming a statistic where it says racial equity kills people of color." And it made it worse that I was by myself with the kids. (CRE meeting, 3.29.19)

Charise, always a force, came to the coaches with such vulnerability. Not only expressing the struggle of a leader of color, but also as a mother. The Coaches responded with affirmations and thanking Charise for trusting them.

Liz:	Charise, you are the team of one and it has got to get hard. I mean, we are all a group, but we are also in our classrooms doing everything. And I know that you are our face and that gets worrying. So at least know, we're behind you.
Charise:	Yeah. I know.
Liz:	But I can't change your baby's poopie pants, okay? [laughter]

The coaches witnessed Charise, in her full self, as they responded with tenderness and care. She was never alone in these feelings as several of the coaches shared similar emotions, anxieties, and struggles. However, they empathized with a shared racialized experience and recognized that Charise, as a district leader not in the classroom, was facing pressures that they were shielded from. They were angry that this was happening to her and impacting the work. As Serena reflected, "We had at least two planning meetings where we didn't plan anything, but we just asked our leader what is it that you need because you're overburdened and she was crying because she's fucking overburdened" (Serena Interview, 12.10.19). That processing space of venting and vulnerability attempted to diffuse the emotional burden, even if they couldn't change what was happening outside of the CRE. In this way the CRE took on a protective quality, for the leaders of color, individually and collectively. It was a space they were cultivating outside the "white gaze" (Morrison, 1988) to be radically vulnerable, whole, and well.

Holding Each Other with Accountability, Respect, and Reciprocity

A catalyzing moment between the coaches and Charise occurred at the retreat that made visible the level of trust and solidarity that existed in the CRE. I had several conversations during the retreat with coaches who were frustrated with the lack of forward movement on projects but had so much respect for Charise and would never want to undermine her leadership. My participation in the CRE meetings over the year and invitation to the retreat felt like a validation

to me, affirming that I had built a level of politicized trust with the coaches. They saw me as a woman of color, leader in that space, and not simply a researcher, something they often forgot (CRE retreat, 8.12.19). Recognizing the tension of the coaches and my trusted, yet external role in the CRE, created an opportunity for me to leverage some of my relational capital in the space. I volunteered to surface, more anonymously, the frustration and concerns of the coaches around Charise's leadership.

Aditi: A quick thing. I think, first, I just really like this group of people. I think the other thing I have observed more from this year is you [talking to Charise] protect a lot of the people in this room, right? [agreement from coaches] Because their time is not paid for, everyone gets burnt out. You get burnt out. You are burnt out [yeahs] and right?

You're taking so much of that emotional labor on, and so many people in this room have said, "We're here for you and we want to be helping you." And what are the protocols that we need to put in place for you and for everyone else here? What if it is something like, nobody goes anywhere alone. What would it look like, Charise, if any meeting you go to, someone from this room has to go with you?

Mel: Yeah.

Aditi: Right? And that's not you asking them, or making them, or taking their time or not valuing them, but they're just wanting to be there with you.

Serena: And also it's accountability for everybody in the room.

Aditi: And it's accountability.

Kat: I was going to suggest we all- we all go.

Aditi: Yes, or all of you. The capacity that people have here is actually immense. And what we know about equity work and collaboration is people give the time when they feel valued and want to do it. It's only work when we are mistreated and abused in our systems. Right. And that's so real. That's so real to everybody sitting here. Right?

Serena: I think everybody here has had multiple conversations in these last three days of Charise's holding a lot. There needs to be multiple Charise's doing this work.

Mel: Yeah. [lots of agreement, emotions, head nodding]

Serena: Because a lot of the time when we're all together, it's like there's this indescribable amount of information that is in your noggin, that you just cannot get out, because there is just so much.

Aditi: Yeah. It's not possible.

Serena: And especially for a new coach who hasn't seen a lot of the context, and the history, and the back work that has been done so that I can just walk in the door and join this team and be welcomed into a team. Yeah. I think we all want to step up.

Aditi: Yeah. These are like tears of love. It's not even you have to let people in. This is it. We're not going to let you keep doing this.

The emotions were flowing and Charise got to see the power of the individuals she had brought together. They were collectively saying we got you, we trust you, and you can trust us. Mel, an extremely kind and notoriously soft-spoken, Filipino school psychologist even chimed in, "I may just speak for myself, but I'm willing to share in that anger. And if I need to step up and be another angry voice at whoever I need to get angry at, I'm willing to do that for you" (CRE retreat, 8.12.19). Multiple coaches shared a similar sentiment, that they would go to bat for Charise and each other. There was enough deep relationship and solidarity in that space to know that Charise could handle the confrontation and that it was necessary for the whole group to move forward. They were learning and practicing how to hold each other with accountability, respect, and reciprocity.

Cultivating a Sacred Space for Healing and Growth

I experienced the CRE as a powerful space of community and commitment. All of the coaches expressed that the CRE was a special place of transformation and nourishment. They professed immense gratitude for each other, "how I'm just fed in so many ways, heart, mind, soul" (Liz, CRE meeting, 5.31.19). Coaches shared how the CRE was an emotional space where they felt seen and heard, they were confident and able to speak up, they looked forward to

coming (CRE meeting, 5.31.19). As Flor shared, “I didn’t belong in the district, but I belong here. My 16 years were leading up to this” (CRE meeting, 5.31.19). Importantly, the CRE was an opportunity to have a space that was so different from what they had experienced. As Kat shared,

> This is the first time that I've worked in a community like this with adults. I think for so long, I was happy with my work at [school], but when I reflect back, all of those happy relationships were students. They were never with colleagues. So this is the first time. So that's really powerful. And then the calibrating and maybe sharing of resources. That's just so cool that we're collaborating in a common goal. There isn't a, we need to all convince somebody to get on board with something. It's just very rare (CRE meeting, 5.31.19).

The CRE wasn’t just a racial affinity space, and it wasn't only an educator workgroup. It was a place to be whole and well in both their personal and professional identities. Being a part of the CRE created a collective identity of solidarity, that they were racial equity educator leaders of color, doing this work, together. As Rita exclaimed, “I think just to be able to be in a room with so many like powerful, especially women of color, is pretty great, and that we're owning our badass-ness! (CRE meeting, 5.31.19). But it was more than just being a bunch of badasses, they relied on each other. The relationships in the CRE were a source of strength and resilience. They talked about coming to the CRE to fortify themselves, fill up, armor up, and go out into the world for battle. For example, during the retreat Charise shared that some folks might transition out of the CRE to make room for new leaders. Several coaches expressed distress, fearing they would lose that safety and support. As Kat reacted,

> So if we go back to Monday and just the moment of thinking transitions, some of us will transition out. My reactions to that were like, but this is where I come. This is my well. I’m going to lose my well. I'm going to lose something and maybe that’s deficit thinking or something, but it was just a true feeling for me. About the safety in this space to process ideas, pain, reflect, whatever, grow here and be stronger when I go do my fighting, my battle, somewhere else. I don't know where else I would get that. So to me, that's something that only exists here. It sort of exists in ethnic studies workgroup because it's a lot similar people, but it's different (CRE meeting, 8.12.19).

Kat's metaphor of the well resonated with so many of the coaches. In particular, coaches talked about how the CRE helped them do hard things. They had this support system behind them, bolstering them and pushing them to lead. Flor describes this experience:

> There's a whole bunch of things I've done that were really scary. I don't think it's so much that they were scary or that I did them. But the fact that I did them, knowing that I had a group of people who would back me up, who would either help me if I was in jeopardy of my job or who would reflect back to me, "That was a kick-ass thing you did" or who would reflect back to me, "Yeah I get why you're in pain because I'm sharing that pain too."[...] I probably wouldn't have continued to keep doing anything if the first hard thing I did, I had no support for. So, because I had support, I could keep doing hard things.

In essence, the CRE enabled their leadership practice. The relationships were the real resource that sustained the work. They weren't receiving leadership development in the academic sense, but they were still developing their leadership, and perhaps a different vision of leadership than what they had witnessed. As some coaches explained, the CRE was helping them become more of who they were meant to be. For example, Lani shared,

> It's like when you put an egg in the incubation, like the heating room to try to like make it hatch faster or whatever. That's what it was. That was the CRE. The CRE was kind of like incubation period. Like it made me hatch a lot faster.

As an observer of this space it was easy to get caught up in trying to define goals and specific outcomes. But the CRE was a place of process and possibility. No matter what frustrations the coaches aired, they always came back to this community of trust, care, and solidarity. Liz's reflection during the retreat felt like an authentic summation of the power of the CRE:

> I want to connect to that and still answer the first question, to why I'm doing this work. It's been nebulous or it's gotten way less nebulous than it once was just a wonderful idea, and we dove in our first year as well. And it was like, what's our role? Who am I with? [laugher] And it was, I think, because that's just comes with our personalities, that just openness to that and resilience.
>
> As much as we have our different levels of organizational needs and planning, what I've gotten out of this and would hate to see go and thought of having to weave out for the next rotation is seconding what you said, Kat, is that it's this energy that's so palpable

> between each other. And I think I said this in one of our Friday meetings, when I'm confronting the white supremacy at my school and elsewhere, I literally envision and think of this group. And it's what buoys me. So that's amazing, and the thought of that going away... but life happens. But that's really what brought me here was the justice work, but what keeps me going is the sustaining, but it's the whole, holistically.
>
> It's my spirit, my heart and soul, but it's the academic, my brain, I'm challenged. I'm introduced to new ideas and concepts constantly from each of you. And I just am growing in ways that I think not until I step away or I'm not a part of this, I can really fully understand. So be okay with that opaqueness, this maybe a little bit of the not knowing exactly your role, because I think that's so inculcated in us, but also it opens us up to really magical things happening. (CRE retreat, 8.12.19)

As Liz posits, the CRE is a "magical" place. The work may be nebulous, but they have something solid. But it wasn't just throwing people of color together or simply having a common goal. Being aligned in values and identities laid a foundation but it was the intentional cultivation of this racialized solidarity, or politicized trust, that is so powerful. I viewed the CRE as a beautiful testament to Charise, as in my interviews coaches never failed to recognize, thank, and acknowledge her leadership in cultivating the space. I observed the CRE coaches put forth a model of relationality steeped in hope, healing, and possibility.

The CRE also illuminates a new way to understand collective leadership. Even when coaches are taking up individual acts of leadership they are imagining and drawing on each other. The reflections shared above elucidate this notion that collective leadership does not require physically acting together. They are holding each other in spirit, psychologically and emotionally tapping into a shared wisdom and resilience.

Conclusion: Racial equity leadership as building politicized trust

As a researcher, I entered the CRE searching for the objects of activity as defined by outcomes or tools. I was seeking "evidence" of the coaches work together through a narrow interpretation of leadership, largely prescribed by the collective bargaining agreement. Instead they were building a collective critique and analysis of the system and attempting to grapple with critical tensions of

role definition and purpose. What I found was that these leaders, through the CRE, were evolving their own conception of racial equity leadership that centered relationships, care, trust, and solidarity. The primarily leadership activity was not necessarily the already constrained avenues of coaching or professional development, but rather a process of building politicized trust.

Chapter 5:

Relational Dynamics and Organizational Boundaries Constraining Leadership

Introduction

In this final findings chapter, I explore how the overlapping activity system of the district impacted the work of the CRE. Specifically, I narrate how the CRE experienced a relational rupture with ED and the way the rupture impacted their leadership activity. In particular, my findings highlight the limits of individual racialized or politicized trust when organizational dynamics assert themselves. Importantly, these organizational dynamics reified boundaries between ED and the CRE and continued to shape the role and vision of coaches in their collective leadership activity.

CRE-ED Relationship Prior to the Rupture

My first interaction with the CRE was during their inaugural retreat the summer of 2017. Educators part of the district-based culturally responsive teaching cadre and coaches for the Center for Racial Equity gathered at Islandwood for 3 days to learn, connect, and plan together. As described in chapter 5, this retreat set the original mission and vision for the CRE. In this first year, the retreat also included district leaders from the district Equity Department (ED). The 2015 bargain created the broader district-union (SPS-SEA) partnership, but the contract itself did not delineate who, within those large organizations, was actually responsible for the work.

Importantly, I observed that there was a tacit understanding that Charise and her team of educators (the CRE) would be critical partners in moving the work of racial equity forward in the district. Marco, a Latinx man and member of the ED team and one of his former colleagues at ED (now an independent equity consultant), spoke with the CRE coaches about their role in the RET work. ED was re-branding from being “equity crisis management” (i.e. getting called when

something racist occurred in a school) into racial equity leadership and on-going support, particularly with the implementation of RETs. ED was busy doing the professional development and "equity 101" and was in need of more on the ground one-on-one support for school equity teams. As Charise narrated, the coaches were the educator experts to fill in that gap in capacity. When questions of what the CRE role would be came up, Charise responded, "we are problem solving with grace" (CRE Retreat, Observation, 8.11.17). Thus, the initial work of the CRE was largely shaped by immediate need based on the district environment and priorities.

During the retreat Charise and Marco appeared to have a friendly and professional relationship, joking and bouncing off of each other in conversation. They were candid about prior district challenges with racial equity work, recognizing that there was a need in the district for additional support and a lack of capacity. They framed the RET work as an opportunity for a fortuitous partnership to work together towards transformation (CRE Observation, 8.11.17). ED's presence and participation in the community-building space of the CRE retreat felt to me like an important indicator of their relative trust and intended collaboration.

Formalizing the Relationship through the Collective Bargaining Agreement

In 2018, SEA and SPS had just finalized a new collective bargaining agreement (CBA), the first one in three years. The bargain was again contentious, similar to the strike-inducing bargain of 2015. While SEA did unanimously vote to authorize a strike, they luckily came to an agreement in time to start the new school year without disruption. However, the 2018 contract was only certified for 2018-2019, meaning they would be back at the bargaining table negotiating this tense process again in less than a year.

Under this new contract, the CRE had a specific and formalized role in district-level racial equity leadership. The CRE was explicitly named in the contract as an entity responsible

for the leadership and support of RETs. And ED was required to collaborate with CRE in planning and implementing the two district-wide all RET professional development days and the five Saturday institutes reserved for the "induction" of new equity teams (CBA 2018-2019). Thus, the CRE and ED, as subunits within the union and district organizations respectively, were now in a contractually mandated partnership that codified the previously informal understanding between individuals.

This official partnership with ED, as an organization, became consequential as it ensured a sustained relationship between the organizations beyond individual leaders. In just over a year since that original retreat, Marco had left the district and he was replaced briefly by a woman of color, who moved up in the district, and then replaced by Elena, a Latina woman, who was in the role of ED director the majority of the time of my study. While I did not observe the CRE and ED in those early years, Charise later talked about the partnership to as amicable and productive. She was clear that the first relationship with ED was really just a singular relationship with Marco because he "understood the educators and didn't want some administration coming into this space" (Charise, CRE meeting, 1.11.19). She mentioned on a few occasions that even through the leadership transitions and Elena taking over ED, she would regularly attend ED staff meetings and retreats, something that was very useful for their relationship and planning (CRE Meeting, 3.29.19). Elena was also a friend, a fellow woman of color she'd known for years, talking often outside of work as allies (Charise Interview, 12.6.19).

Charise was even involved in hiring a new ED team member, Ben, "a white guy but at least an educator" who was in the department during my study (CRE meeting, 1.11.19). Getting more educators in district leadership had long been a priority for the union, as an effort to elevate educator expertise, and a move to address the common critique of district leadership lacking

practice-based knowledge. I interpreted the fact that a union leader was part of a hiring committee for a departmental district position as a gesture of good will towards their collaboration.

Recognizing the Importance of Educators and Building an Intentional Partnership

When I asked Elena about the partnership with the CRE and relationship with Charise, she affirmed much of what Charise had expressed over the past several months, including how strong their relationship had been prior to the rupture. She talked about how she was "in community" with Charise and how beautiful the partnership was, particularly in their first year. She shared how Charise and she were a team and when they each got complaints from different constituents (union or district), they were "completely aligned in our response" (Elena Interview, 12.8.19). "I CC'd Charise on everything. She CC'd me on everything. What I found is some members emailed me, some emailed her. We said this is what we're doing" (Elena interview, 12.8.19). She talked about having trust with Charise and being values aligned.

Elena worked hard to cultivate an intentional relationship with Charise, talking often, and developing routines around the work.

> When she and I worked together, we would talk about which schools need what, who needs what, who couldn't go into here. That means you have to know your people. It means you have to know your partners. You have to know your network. That means you have to talk all the time. Charise and I, because we were still developing, we decided to meet every two weeks and did planning together. (Elena interview, 12.8.19)

Elena shared how ED and CRE were not yet working collaboratively as departments. Charise was building her team, Elena was working with ED, and they met in the "in between time" (Elena Interview, 12.8.19).

Elena also recognized that the relationship with Charise was strategic and essential to the work of racial equity. Charise, and the Center for Racial Equity, was part of her larger vision of systemic transformation. As Elena describes,

> I knew her department, her organization within SEA was new. I knew deep in my heart if she couldn't get the Center for Race and Equity to be embedded systemically in SEA, we would not have the change we needed. I knew that. I knew moving ahead that I had to invest as much in her center as our work because that was what was going to systematize the work. The way the district did it previously was they were going to invest in the ones who want to do it. That was not my frame. It's everybody work. It is the board. It's the district. It's the teachers. It's the leaders.

Elena's strategy was to build a coalition of "champions," people in all levels of the system who had the positional authority and relationships in their spheres to push the work forward. Along with other leaders in the district, Elena parceled out the work. For example, she would champion the work of principals (as a former principal herself) and other leaders would focus on areas such as the executive cabinet and superintendent. Charise represented a powerful constituency of educators, and the union. "In order to build a partnership you need to respect and value the union, not agree with everything, but recognize that they have trust and influence over their membership" (Elena Interview, 12.8.19). The CRE specifically, was just one piece of a giant racial equity puzzle. Elena was putting her pieces in place to shift the system from the inside out.

> I knew I had to work with Charise's Center for Racial Equity. We needed her. She was also part of that plan. I had to invest in that relationship. There were things that she knew about the membership that I didn't. She had relationships that I didn't because I'd been so removed from teachers. Especially, being a principal. People have to acknowledge that but they don't. (Elena Interview, 12.8.19)

The district being removed from educators was a critical "gap" in the system that she recognized as being unacknowledged (by the district) and in need of attention. It was also an internal challenge amongst her ED staff. Elena planned to invite Charise to ED staff meetings once a month to continue "building that relationship" but faced resistance from her staff initially. They

were suspicious of why "the union" was there and were concerned that would "try to tell them what to do" (Elena Interview). While they were all strong racial equity leaders with critical analysis, none of them (prior to Nikki) had been teachers. They had been seen as experts in their spaces and their only expectation was to work with the central office. Elena explains,

> "So it was, really, for me, it was a bit of nuancing to get them to understand that Charise, and what Charise represented, was access and information and thinking around how to make the work applicable to teachers. And so that took a good year for us to really build that trust over time"

Nikki was also an incredibly important hire for Elena, as a teacher who was respected in the district, and could "see both sides" of the district and the union. Nikki became both a relational and knowledge bridge between the CRE and ED[17].

Elena's narration of her relationship with Charise and goals for the partnership affirmed my understanding that there was a level of racialized and politicized trust between these individuals. They were both women of color working towards shifting a system towards racial equity, and each building from their respective constituencies. In those early years, Charise and Elena's relationship was intentionally cultivated, perhaps more by Elena, but with the intent to mitigate some of those union-district or educator-administration boundaries and dynamics.

However, I did begin to notice a particular directionality to the partnership. For example, Charise was part of a ED hiring process but no ED or district leaders were involved in the hiring process for the CRE coaches or any other union-based position. Charise talked about attending ED meetings but Elena did not come to CRE meetings (this would later be a point of contention). It was evident that Charise was the coaches' conduit to the district space, bringing information

[17] There was a brief mention of a "healing circle" facilitated by Nikki between CRE and ED as a recognition and response to the positioning and tension. Nikki acknowledged that this happened and none of my participants had much to say about it. My takeaway was that it might not have been as impactful as hoped and it remained a one-off event.

back and forth. None of the coaches spoke about having a relationship with ED and they never attended ED meetings. When I asked CRE coaches in my interviews about the relationship between CRE and ED they mostly pointed me to Charise. In this way, it appeared to me as if Charise had a bit of influence to advocate on behalf of CRE and some regular structures, like joining ED meetings, that kept the partnership afloat, but perhaps more on CRE terms. Charise held a critical role in ensuring the CRE's place in district leadership and decision-making. As I describe in this chapter, this role would become increasingly tenuous as relationships and organizational dynamics shifted over time.

We're on the same side: Common Goal of Developing Racial Equity Leaders

During the first CRE professional development day of 2019, Charise invited two members of the ED team to join the meeting. Nikki, a Black Indigenous educator turned district racial equity specialist, and Ben, a white man who was the brand new racial equity coordinator and newcomer to the district. Most of the people in the room (including me) had an existing relationship with Nikki, greeting her with hugs and smiles (CRE observation, 1.11.19). At the time Nikki was the only member of ED who was both "district and union" as the one SEA represented educator (and SEA board member) in the ED district leadership team. Ben was in his first week on the job and mostly observed in the space while Nikki took up a co-facilitation role with Charise during the meeting.

Even though Nikki was in a district job and had been out of the classroom in district level Native education work for a few years, Nikki clearly positioned herself as a teacher. She talked about "our" work and the oppression of the district, as if she was not part of the district, and how it was impacting "us," referring to herself as part of the coaches (CRE Observation, 1.11.19). The framing felt to me as if the CRE had snuck a teacher in to infiltrate the district, in alignment

with their theory of change to influence leadership and decision-making spaces. For example, Nikki and Charise talked about the district's lack of capacity and framed their (CRE and ED) need to keep pushing the work and building equity tools “until the district catches on that we are brilliant” (CRE observation, 1.11.19). ED was organizationally part of the district but they, at least Nikki and Ben, were creating an identity in the CRE space of pushing against the district and being on the same team as the CRE. In addition, Charise and Nikki both talked about the strength of their personal relationship, across those district-union boundaries, always strategizing and scheming together, and “even texting each other at 2am” (CRE observation, 1.11.19).

This was one of two meetings during the year where ED members (but not Elena the ED director) would join the CRE meeting time. On this occasion it was to start developing a tool identifying core competencies of racial equity leaders. As Nikki explained, “If our goal is to build capacity, we need to build people into racial equity leaders. What things do we think are essential to being leaders, from our position of leaders and experts? What do they [leaders] need to do? (CRE observation, 1.11.19). The purpose was to create a shared document about what racial equity leadership is and what they were striving for. Nikki referred to this task of developing racial equity leadership as a common goal and collective act of the CRE and ED, from their shared role of RET coaches. While Nikki and Charise had some materials for inspiration, this was a fresh collective brainstorming session with the intention of becoming a collaborative shared activity. Unfortunately, after this one session, I never heard about the racial equity leadership competencies again and it is unclear whether ED continued on with this work independently.

Early Warning Signs of a Relational Rift

After this meeting observation I was left with some wonderings about the role and relationship of CRE and ED based on the way it was impacting the CRE. While the next CRE meeting did not include ED, I noticed tensions emerging in the CRE. A few moments in particular gave me pause because they began to demarcate some interesting boundaries between the CRE and ED, as well as between the broader union and the district that these organizations were nested within.

Competition or Collaboration

During the meeting, the coaches began working on a scope and sequence for racial equity teams (as described in the previous chapter). At one point in the conversation they mentioned a team continuum that ED had created, thinking that could be a useful jumping off point for their tool. Charise interjected that the ED continuum tool was soon to be defunct and the following exchange occurred:

> **Rita**: Are they reworking it or is it just going to be something totally different?
>
> **Charise**: Uh, it was inspirational. It will likely look different. And when we say they, I would say Nikki and Ben are leading it, but I'm in on those conversations and I get a consulted, and then sometimes I participate in the creation of that stuff. And ultimately, they already know that before it goes into action, it needs to come before you.
>
> Matter of fact, I actually thought they would have something for me to share with you today. I've been bugging them, and they're like, "It's not ready yet." I'm like, "Fine." But I just told them right now, I was like, "Well, we're creating a scope and sequencing, you better give me something real quick." (CRE Observation, 3.8.19)

This micro moment brought up some larger organizational dynamics of interest. For one, Charise is acknowledging that the work is being led by Nikki and Ben, with a noticeable omission of the ED director, Elena. Given that Charise previously spoke about her close working relationship

with Elena, the fact that Elena did not attend the prior meeting and Charise is not naming her as part of the ED made me question what was being left unsaid, as if something was brewing (spoiler: it was). Second, Charise is telling the coaches that ED is creating a tool that is intended to benefit both CRE and ED purposes, largely without the CRE. She talks about being "consulted" and suggests that the CRE is being positioned as more of a vetting body as opposed to a collaborator. And finally, she is highlighting the urgency in the work, the need to get this tool, the scope and sequence, out there. Charise's quote above suggests that the CRE might beat ED to the punch if ED doesn't "give me something real quick." It hinted at a more competitive relationship over collaborative and was perplexing that they would even be investing effort into creating parallel structures for the same purposes.

A Lack of Co-Planning in "Co-Planned" Institutes

The CBA put in motion the collaboration between ED and the CRE of Saturday Institutes, a requirement Elena credits her predecessor for advancing. Elena and Charise had already been working together for a couple years before they entered a co-creation and co-decision making relationship. Elena noted how creating these institutes with the CRE brought up tensions again on her team, "a ding to their professionalism and expertise" (Elena Interview, 12.8.19). Specifically, they had started asking questions of why Charise could come to their meetings, but they never got to know what was happening in the CRE. Elena similarly expressed irritation for "never being invited" and having "zero access" to Charise's team (Elena Interview, 12.8.19). Nevertheless, Elena and Charise pushed forward to co-design the institutes. Elena explains,

> And when the team [department] actually saw that co-design didn't mean we're giving up everything. Once they saw it in motion, it took a couple institutes to kind of get people over it but once it became the new normal; then they saw how much more value added the teachers were feeling and how much the CRE's were feeling part of it. So it was really

> about me and Charise having to do some intentional work of making our schools and our groups feel like they were contributing. They were having some input that they were having in the process, they were having credible input and that they were seeing evidence for the work.
>
> And also I was really intentional, I had to be very intentional during the institutes to not exclude them [CRE], introduce them and luckily that helped because then I showed up for Charise. Does that make sense? I had to show up to this physically. I had to show up for the coaches. I bent over backwards a little bit to make them feel like, no, you're part of this. Even if my whole team wasn't there, I had to step it up and be the leader and just model that. I had to model like this is what co-design means. And I'm a philosopher, I believe in co-design so I had to model what it meant. I had to model what it looked like. I had to intentionally model that this is a we thing. This isn't just the Equity Department planning this and they helped us, they're not our assistants. I had to model it all the time. And I did that very intentionally in the first three months because my team still wasn't there completely. (Elena Interview, 12.8.19)

Similar to Charise, Elena agreed that they did collaborate in those initial Saturday Institutes. Collaboration meant that Charise was part of the ED conversations, they were incorporating CRE perspectives and ideas, and there was a role for the CRE coaches, that to Elena, was not about simply assisting ED. Through the "co-design" of Saturday institutes Elena reiterated the intentionality and commitment that she showed to this partnership with the CRE.

However, the account from Charise and Elena did not totally match with the experience of the coaches or the ED staff. For example, I asked Ben, as a ED employee, his perspective on the collaboration with the CRE. He shared that it was "in the CBA in terms of the word collaboration and the idea of co-creation" but it was never co-created institutes (Ben interview, 11.22.19).

> What that meant mostly last year was we never collectively planned an institute with the coaches and us together. It was really Charise and the director, Elena, together planning and then we would get delegated certain things to do to get it ready. (Ben interview, 11.22.19)

Ben's interview recognized the importance of the relationship between Charise and Elena, and how the "collaboration" was hinging on that individual dynamic. As the coaches had shared

earlier, they really didn't have much contact with the ED team. Nevertheless, the inclusion of Charise, as a representative of the CRE, into the district space was politically powerful to furthering the vision of the CRE and ED.

Given this history and collaboration stipulation in the contract, I was surprised when Charise reminded the coaches about an upcoming Saturday Institute, but the coaches were barely aware the institute was even happening. The coaches didn't know the date, agenda, time, or location of the "co-created" institute (CRE Meeting, 3.8.19). While there was never "full collaboration" in these institutes, coaches did share that at previous institutes they had, "at least got an agenda", usually by email prior to the institute (Rita interview, 12.10.19). I had also observed previous institutes where coaches had a more central role in the institutes through leading teacher workshops and facilitating table conversations.

However, this upcoming institute was different as there was no direct communication about the institute or their role. One of the coaches, Kat, asked Charise what their role was supposed to be at the institute. As Kat shared,

> I struggle when I don't have something to do. Just sharing that. I know myself. The last institute we had, I felt like I was sitting for hours. I can't do that. So I really want a specific task or to be able to do this work that we're doing right now or something… (CRE Meeting, 3.8.19).

Charise responded that the coaches played an important role by bringing their expertise to the institutes and leading in that space. "If you're seeing that something's not being said and topics are, for whatever reason, not being brought up, then that is the leadership. That you have to be able to push that forward into that conversation" (Charise, CRE Meeting, 3.8.19). She followed by saying "I hear you though" and told the coaches that since there was not a specific ask from ED for the coaches at the institute, they were welcome to use that time to do their own work

(CRE Meetings, 3.8.19). Charise was giving the coaches permission to disengage from the space given that it was likely not going to be a good use of their time. Her response and Kat's question solidified my sense that this was not even a loose interpretation of co-created institutes, and perhaps a source of role confusion and tension for the CRE.

District framing as accountability and compliance

The last warning sign I noticed during my observation was an emerging narrative around the district and framing the district as solely concerned with accountability, evaluation, and academic achievement (CRE meeting, 3.8.19). This idea came up a few times during the meeting and was heightened by Charise alerting the coaches that collective bargaining was again quickly approaching. One concern was the district's emphasis on expanding RETs to every school. While it might seem like a win to mandate racial equity and push for full scale implementation, Charise worried that they did not have the infrastructure and capacity to adequately support that many new teams and schools (CRE meeting, 3.8.19). Coaches were already concerned that the schools and the district were using RETs as a checkbox to say, "oh, we're not racist because we have a racial equity team" (Lani, CRE meeting, 3.8.19). And that the district funding RETs was another one of their "hidden ways" to say that they are "committed to racial equity" (CRE meeting, 3.8.19). As Flor expressed in the meeting, "it's a comfortable thing they can be part of."

Charise noted that the energy to expand RETs was exciting but shared a larger fear that scaling up so quickly would be disastrous and ultimately undermine the work. Specifically, she suggested that schools that were not prepared to authentically engage could result in RETs being deemed "ineffective" and consequently cause the district to eliminate them. Charise airs this concern,

> There's a threat to effectiveness of racial equity teams, meaning should we continue them? So that's always been there, but the fact that it's still there, is what's bothering me.

> So for instance, if we decide that racial equity teams are impacting instruction, let's put it that way. Right? Because then it shows up in standardized tests. And then we make all schools have racial equity teams. Then we immediately know that our effectiveness as a racial equity team goes down. Because those schools that are not on it, that didn't get on it in other ways before, are not going to be effective. So it looks like we're less effective. And if the school district is determining racial equity team effectiveness by whether or not they change standardized tests based on instruction, that can mean they can say that's too much money, we'll cut it out. (CRE meeting, 3.8.19)

Charise is promoting a narrative that the district only cares about test scores and that is the way they will evaluate RETs. She is framing full implementation of RETs as a move to actually abolish RETs. It isn't totally clear whether the "we" being less effective is referring to the CRE or to educators or the union in general, but it does start feeding into an oppositional identity to the district.

This comes up again later in the meeting when Charise informed the coaches about a research practice partnership between the union, district, and university about how to measure the effectiveness of RETs. She told the group how the district was primarily concerned with the impact of RETs on learning but frames the conversation again as test scores.

> We [SEA] made it very clear in our last meeting on Monday that if that's the only thing that you are valuing, the results will be very little. The impact is little because it's a systemic issue. And if that's the truth, and then you turn around and use it against us to say, "Therefore racial equity teams are ineffective," we're going to have a problem. (CRE meeting, 3.8.19)

There is again an "us" versus "them" dynamic in this conversation and a clear critique on district priorities, While Charise is using broader language of "results" and "impact," these words signal to the coaches familiar evaluation metrics such as test scores. In response, Flor makes this coded language explicit.

> **Flor**: So I just want to go back a little bit to again, so what's the RET for, and how do we measure effectiveness? And if the district is primarily concerned about student achievement, then it should own up to the fact that the tool that they're using to measure is racist.

Charise: Well, we don't have a tool yet developed.

Flor: No, no, no, no, okay. So like right now we, we judge student achievement by standardized tests. And those tests are racist, right? So like, that's the only thing I'm thinking that's important to them [the district] because that's always what I hear about. I'm worried if that's how you're going to use... So you're going to try and link racial equity team actively to changes in their [student] scores on this racist tool? That's a no-go.

The framing of the district as racist and symbolic, while promoting an accountability logic, continues to reinforce the oppositional nature of the CRE. While they are not naming how they would measure RETs or what "effectiveness" means for them, they are clear that the district is incorrect and not aligned with their values.

The fear of the district getting rid of RETs also illuminates a broader power dynamic between the district and the union. They might be "partners" on paper, but the district controls policy that impacts the practice of educators. Charise highlights this in reference to her role in the research-practice partnership:

> So, part of this being in a research partnership is that we all have equal say at the table. So we really want to make that really loud and clear. There's not a ask for me right now for you [coaches]. It's more that I just need people to start knowing that this is a thing that's coming through. These are things that's happening in our district. This research can really have a huge impact on racial equity teams. It can have a huge impact on things that the district prioritizes around racial equity. If the results of things like this [research] show to not have the type of impact the district thinks it should, then the district would have grounds to say, "we don't need them," which of course impacts us district wide.

Getting rid of RETs would be a blow to the work of educators, staff, administration, students, and families who engaged in RETs as a tool of possibility towards school-wide transformation. And it would significantly impact the work of the CRE and SEA by removing an important leadership opportunity for educators and a powerful decision-making space of influence for the union in district policy and practice. The work of the CRE is constantly being shaped by the

district, and there are growing concerns of how much influence the district has over their role in the future.

Dissolving Relations

The tensions and warning signs I observed in the CRE meetings described above came to a head during the next district RET all-team institute. The institute was taking place in a large common area and entrance hallway of the building, with chairs crammed together in rows with little walking space and pillars obstructing the view of the PowerPoint in front. To me the room felt chaotic and crowded. It did not seem to me like this would have been the intended location when previous institutes had occurred in school cafeterias and gymnasiums to accommodate the number of educators. In addition, there were signs on the chairs with sections marked “whites” and “colored” with no further instructions. ED was setting up an experiential activity on systemic racism, adding to the confusion and physical discomfort (RET institute, 3.19.19).

I spotted the coaches and huddled up with Flor, Dawn, Liz, Taylor, Lani, and Serena who were not sure what they were supposed to be doing or how they should participate in the activity. Nikki and Charise grabbed us and pulled us aside to give a quick run-down of the day. The institute was focused on structural racism, critical race theory, and whiteness and would be entirely led by ED staff. Nikki apologized to the coaches for not including them in the planning and that this all came together at the last minute and that they were scrambling (RET Institute, 3.19.19). Nikki highlighted that the last piece of the agenda, only 45 minutes, was reserved for coaches to meet with their RETs and discuss the action plans required for teams to submit at the end of the year.

When the institute began, one of the ED staff members holding the microphone, welcomed the educators and introduced the ED team. Charise, standing near the front of the

room close to the ED staff member, mouthed something that sounded like coaches and the ED staff member responded “oh yes, coaches please stand” with no introduction of who the coaches were or the context of the CRE (RET Institute, 3.19.19). I only saw two coaches, Flor and Lani hesitantly stand up and look at each other quizzically. I don’t think the other coaches heard the instruction, were paying attention, or were even all in the room for the surprise introduction. There was still a hum of educators chatting with each other and Deborah quickly moved on to the agenda (RET Institute, 3.19.19).

The rest of the professional development day I saw coaches participate during the group activities, but they were not recognized in any way for their leadership role. Charise was largely absent from the space, and I later found her on her phone crying in the corner. ED eventually cut the only portion of the agenda for RETs to meet and talk with coaches due to lack of time and by the end of the day, only a couple coaches were even left at the institute (RET institute, 3.19.19). I left the institute feeling confused of the CRE’s relationship with ED and felt a disconnect with the previous rhetoric of collaboration. The institute was not co-constructed with the CRE, and without any role or recognition for the coaches, these “partners” were barely even included. Something had gone wrong and the institute became a harbinger for the impending shift in relationship between CRE and ED and the subsequent re-evaluation of CRE’s role in racial equity leadership.

Organizational Boundaries Reasserting

The following CRE meeting, Kat, a coach, facilitated a plus, minus, or delta (i.e. positive, negative, or change) activity to debrief the RET institute and fill everyone in who was not present. The coaches’ mounting frustrations began to fully unfold as they critiqued the activities, facilitation, and “execution” of the Saturday institute, which was nearly entirely ED

content delivery and no direct application for teams, a priority they had been naming all year (CRE meeting, 3.29.19). As Taylor reflected to the group,

> I will share a piece of feedback I heard from two different team members that were there, in which the feedback essentially was, it seems like the district people are talking a lot today. And so, I've been trying to process, okay, what does that mean?
>
> And I think it means a couple of things. At least how I've processed it since then is, it means that when we're being introduced, I don't know if people are really seeing us as like, oh, I'm [points to herself] a kindergarten teacher. First and foremost, I'm a kindergarten teacher and that's what I do. I think people are seeing us as authority, aka SPS downtown.
>
> So, yeah. So I was just trying to sort of, I don't know, process what does that mean? I don't know, but it was an interesting piece of feedback. People thought that they didn't have enough time to process as participants. At least the two people who brought it up to me separately, which I thought was interesting. They weren't feeling like they had time to process as participants and they felt like it was a really top-down district conversation. (CRE meeting, 3.29.19)

Taylor's reflection on the institute reveals an important theme that continued to emerge the rest of the day: the coaches did not want to be positioned as or mistaken for the district. For one, they didn't see themselves as this top-down authority, they wanted to be recognized for "being teachers, too" (Dawn, CRE meeting, 3.29.19). And second, they did not create this institute and did not want to be associated with it. For example Lani commented, "maybe it's a good thing they didn't introduce us" and Kat exclaimed, "it wasn't us!" (CRE meeting, 3.29.19).

Several of the coaches had "historical knowledge" of previous district trainings and recounted how it was the same "recycled" activities they had seen at least three times, developed by the first iteration of ED staff, none of whom were still in the district (CRE meeting, 3.29.19). Flor did jump in to defend Nikki (not ED as a whole) and acknowledge that they didn't have enough time to plan and that "they literally only had time to work on it last night," otherwise "it would have gone better" (CRE meeting, 3.29.19). With over 100 educators present, coaches felt

it was a missed opportunity to continue delivering professional development and not have teams working with each other. Rita highlights this below:

> **Rita**: And I still think groups really want to be able to hear from each other, and hear what's going on in, I don't know. My team has repeatedly wanted to see other people's action plans. And I know for my team last year, when [school name] shared[18], that was one of the things that they found most impactful. And so, it's nice having the work time within our teams, but really, we have this opportunity that all these teams are here together. And so I just feel like we continue to have it be more PD versus taking advantage of all that wealth of knowledge that we have and all the wealth of... Especially when we do-
>
> **Kat**: Top down versus…
>
> **Rita**: we have all the teams, at different stages. To provide models, examples, and share.

Rita and Kat are reiterating how the district approached the institute as a "top-down" one-way transmission of information, a strategy which was at odds with their understanding of good professional development. It is rare in the district to be able to convene such a large group of educators across racial equity teams, and the coaches felt like the district squandered the opportunity.

The institute was another example of a district training that once again did not meet the needs of educators, unsurprisingly because they didn't collaborate with educators[19]. Charise stepped in to make that point clear. She shared that she was, "not part of planning this particular institute, which, as you know, was bargained for in our last contract" and how she was only "notified" of various activities (Charise, CRE meeting, 3.29.19). This was the CRE's expertise, a collective of racial equity educator leaders who know what RETs are asking for. And even with a

[18] The High School racial equity team did a panel at a previous institute talking about their work, successes, and challenges.

[19] Even though ED staff Nikki, Ben, and Leah were former educators and hold teaching credentials, the CRE does not consider them as educators.

contractually mandated requirement to “co-create”, they were excluded. As a result, the CRE wanted to distance themselves from that institute, distinguish themselves from ED, and began imagining how they could forge ahead without them. Processing and debriefing the event catalyzed a set of oppositional dynamics that would only continue to escalate.

Charise Spills the Tea: Making relational dynamics explicit

That CRE meeting was a turning point in the relationship with ED. Compared to the first CRE meeting where ED was fighting the same fight against the district, now ED was synonymous with the district. Charise wasn’t holding anything back and played a critical role in bringing the coaches into her rapidly deteriorating partnership with ED. For example, RETs and coaches on behalf of their RETs, kept asking for more guidance on completing the district mandated action plans, the piece of the institute that was cut. Liz asked Charise if she had any information about the action plans or any models to help the teams. Charise responded that she had texted Nikki to send it to her, but Nikki instead sent a link to the institute PowerPoint, not the action plan information she requested. Charise continued,

> So this is another hierarchical issue, right? When it was just me and Marco, I had whatever access I wanted to, whatever information I felt I needed. When [new leader] came on, she kind of just rolled with what had already been established. When Elena came on, kind of still... Once [ED staff members] came on... at this point, I have a folder [raises one finger] in the drive and it's not the one with the racial equity teams. And they're definitely gate keeping information.

Nikki sending Charise the wrong thing could have been just a simple mistake or careless error. After all, the ED team was rapidly shifting constantly and there could have been miscommunications within the team. Even in the quote above Charise mentioned new ED staff members that I never met during my study. But given Charise’s experience of feeling shut out of the ED space, with less and less access to shared materials, Nikki sending the wrong file

furthered the perception of ED as gatekeepers who were not interested in collaboration. This potentially otherwise "harmless" interaction took on new meaning as another example of how the district really operates. Importantly, Charise's experience highlighted to the coaches that ED was not only part of "the system" but also perpetuating a system they were fighting against.

We have to keep fighting

I observed that the language in the CRE continued to blend the boundary between ED and the district. Given the CRE's experiences with their collaboration, the distinction between ED and the district was not of consequence to them. The coaches were frustrated about the institute and they were not getting what they needed from ED as leaders to support RETs. The following interaction highlights this increasingly adversarial relationship:

Kat: So I'm curious. I'm trying to understand more, do you feel like we're losing footing? Or that we need to fight for or make a case for…

Charise: Yes.

Kat: Okay.

Charise: And I wish this was way more institutionalized so that we didn't have to keep fighting for rights. [Flor: mmhmm] I would like to fight for that, and then that's done and then I can fight for something else and then that's done. But if I fight for that and this other thing, and this other thing, [Kat: yup, yup] I can't remember it all. So the idea of having to fight back for it, it's just not…

Liz: And we keep getting back to that this is systematic, the institutional thing is *sustaining*. So, what's next year's looking like? Why can't we know that, and this isn't directed at you [speaking to Charise]. This is the system. Why can't we know that now? So we can plan, get our ducks in a row? We're always responsive and not proactive, and that's definitely frustrating for me. It's not like we don't have the information, what we need to do. We have our deltas [pointing at the institute debrief notes] in place. (CRE meeting, 3.29.19)

Kat's question is framing this relationship with ED as a "fight" for their rights as educators and leaders. Charise is honoring how exhausting it is to perpetually be in that struggle for recognition and access. And Liz is fed up. She wants to be able to plan for the future. They, the coaches, have "their deltas" meaning they know what to change and they know what needs to be done. The CRE is not talking about ED as collaborators, it sounded to me like they were in a turf war. And, as the coaches discuss later on, they want more agency to shape these critical district-level leadership spaces.

Abandoning Action Plans as an Act of Resistance

Prior to the arrival of ED at the meeting, Charise opened a discussion around problems of practice, however, this time the problems of practice were specifically targeted towards the ED mandated action plans. All RETs were required to turn in their action plans at the end of the school year and coaches had already expressed how unclear and unhelpful they found action plans to be (CRE meeting, 3.29.19).

Charise explains to the group:

> **Charise**: I noticed multiple times in here [CRE], and certainly via email, that teams are desperate for some sort of direction and advice around the action plans, right? And I also hear that you, as coaches, feel like you're not prepared because there's not clear information or clear process, or even just the form itself sucks, right? What is it then? How do we support them knowing that they're also trying to figure this out and wanting to make it meaningful? ED has accepted that it's way more of a ... what's it called when you have to-
>
> **Rita**: Compliance.
>
> **Charise**: ... a compliance. Not that it was intended that way-
>
> **Rita**: But it turned into that.
>
> **Charise**: ... but it sure does have that feel. So there's already some work to do something different for when we want to use it as part of any of our evaluation of teams and things like that, but trying not to make it a

> compliance. Nikki is here [from ED] because she's coming a little bit later to share and get feedback so that we can do this collectively and make sure that we are guiding it together. But before we do all that, I want us to think about what are the challenges that our teams are having, not just their basic question of we need an example because all of a sudden if we had one, we would know how to fill this out. We know that there are other layers that even trying to get them to a place of a realistic action plan that's changeable and adaptive and is actually effective for the school and not just kind of ... for some schools, they have a goal that's ridiculously big and they have no idea how to even get to it. And some are so tiny that their accomplishment is their multicultural night. They just add a couple more people of color, they do something, right?
>
> [...] If we want teams to have some sort of action plan that they can really focus on and really stick to, don't get sidetracked by all the other stuff that happens, all the racial incidents that often will then derail any sort of momentum they may have...And what are the things, what are the elements in that team that's keeping them from getting there? (CRE meeting, 3.29.19)

Charise is simultaneously perpetuating the familiar district accountability logic by recognizing that the action plans are a form of compliance while positioning the CRE as ones with the expertise to actually support RETs. The coaches split up into small groups to discuss the barriers they saw RETs facing in completing the action plans. However, Charise stopped the conversation, noting it was not as generative as she was hoping and that maybe bounding the "problems of practice" conversation by focusing on the district action plan was too constraining. She re-framed her question:

> So we know that teams have to write action plans. We know that they're not the thing that's going to be useful to change practice in the classrooms. I want us to think what's kind of bigger things we really want this team to do. Oh, I know, the actual question though is what's keeping them from doing that bigger vision. (CRE meeting, 3.29.19).

Charise's more expansive question attempted to de-center the mandated action plan by instead asking coaches to draw on their expertise from the RETs. However, the coaches' conversation that followed actually re-centered the action plan by identifying the action plan as a central

barrier to RETs moving forward. Thus, the coaches were positioning themselves in opposition to the district, which was creating the barriers to racial equity.

As a result the coaches were already navigating around the action plan mandate but weren't sure if they had the permission.

> **Flor**: Well, I have one. I just have a meaty question that I hope ... and maybe a suggestion or a pushback. If it does feel like compliance, it's April. The deadline is April and then there's May and June. And I'm thinking about my own team and we are not going to come up with some quality action plan in the time that we have available. And I'm already scheming to rebel and say, "we're going to get started. And I have no expectation that we're going to finish because if the expectation is we're going to finish, our plan is going to be crappy, but we can start with some real deep thought-provoking conversation about what we want our action plan to be like." And so the question is how solid is this deadline for one thing? And does the action plan have to look like the form that ED gives us? Can we have a different form?
>
> **Serena**: That's a good question.
>
> **Flor**: Why is it this form that we need to ... that kind of thing. So, that's it.

Flor's comment of already planning to rebel spoke to several of the coaches. A few more jumped in to express similar views. Hana for example thought it was the exact same tool as the continuous school improvement plan (CSIP) that building leadership teams were already completing each year. The ED action plan was "nothing groundbreaking" and Hana had already advised her team to just turn in the action plan, by the deadline, but it wouldn't be "graded" (CRE meeting, 3.291.19). The RETs were already feeling so stressed and "trying to get it right" but the point was to make it into something useful to themselves.

Kat also highlighted how the action plans might be creating some fear for RETs, like the action plans being turned into the district was evaluative and since they applied to be an RET,

they could be cut (CRE meeting, 3.29.19). Serena was blunt about questioning who this was all really for:

> **Serena**: Mine was just really simple. Who is this for? Is this for the teams themselves to create a timeline of what it is that we want to do and why? Is this for ED? Is it for the coaches? [School name] team this is like our fourth year and we know we're supposed to do this action plan, but just because Nikki's been emailing us about it. That's been the only drive to do it.
>
> **Charise**: I can answer the question in part very quickly. It initially was for straight up compliance so that we could argue for why we should continue to pay stipends to teams, to the cabinet basically, and the partnership committee quite literally. It came up in bargains. That's one, is my understanding. The hope was that there would be something done in a process that at least was helpful to the teams. And as far as ED… after the fact, they were like, "well, maybe there's this thing with some information that we could kind of gather that we might then be able to plan differently." But the intention was backwards. You see how that happened? And there is an attempt to correct. But without this conversation, without identifying it very clearly, like we are starting to, then it will continue to be that then.

Charise's response to Serena's question of audience highlights how ED was "working backwards" and trying to make a compliance tool into something useful. But she is questioning that motivation and instead positions the coaches, "this conversation" as what is missing from the ED leadership attempts, irrespective of Charise's individual role in some of those decision-making spaces. In Charise's perspective the action plan wasn't created by starting with the experiences of educators or with RETs needs in mind. I interpreted her comment as saying that the CRE would have done it differently and probably more effectively.

The result of this conversation was a collective CRE plan to abandon, re-frame, or re-purpose the district mandated action plan. Charise told the coaches they could "blame it" on her and tell the teams exactly what they discussed here; it was just for compliance and they should approach it as such (CRE meeting, 3.29.19). The CRE spent their remaining time brainstorming

how they would, without this action plan hindering them, approach their RETs in their final meeting to sustain their work and plan for the next school year. As Charise shared, the tool was "very purposefully interfering with sustaining" RETs and the coaches should instead be helping teams craft a mission and vision statement that remains beyond all the ED staff "turnovers" (CRE meeting, 3.29.19).

I thought this was an important moment for the CRE. They were collectively resisting a mandate from the district that they believed was not in the best interest of themselves and their RETS. Their vision of racial equity leadership did not include these action plans. However, ED was not privy to this conversation and I think assumed that RETs would still be completing action plans as previously defined. The action plans were the only tool ED had to collect RET data and assess the programmatic needs. As a result, this act of agency and leadership on their part of the CRE created tensions and challenges for the leadership activity of ED.

Drawing a Boundary between ED and the CRE

Fascinatingly, ED was on the agenda to join the CRE meeting that afternoon. Given the coaches' RET debrief, heated discussion of the relational dynamics, and their resistance to the action plans, I assumed that these frustrations would surface when they were all in person together. Unfortunately, they did not. Instead, Nikki, Ben, and another new ED member, Leah, came to talk about (another) new tool, separate from the action plan, they were developing to support RETs.

The room felt different this time when ED came to the CRE, particularly between Nikki and Charise. Instead of Charise and Nikki co-facilitating, standing next to each other, and jumping in to finish each other's thoughts (CRE meeting, 1.11.19), Charise gave Nikki the floor and sat to the side on her computer. She did not engage in the conversation and interrupted Nikki

twice to give a "time check" so they did not run over the 30-minute ED allotted section in the agenda (CRE meeting, 3.29.19). Nikki began by thanking the CRE team for "giving me a little air time during your work time," already subtly naming the intrusion of ED into the CRE space (CRE meeting, 3.29.19).

In contrast to the first meeting where Nikki used "we" language to identify with the coaches/CRE, this time Nikki framed the conversation from her perspective as a ED employee. In her introduction she attempts to name the positioning of ED in the district:

> What started out as me trying to figure out what my job is, has kind of turned into thought partnering with Ben and Charise. And now Leah, if you don't know Leah, she's the newest member to the ED team, both teachers. So it's been nice to have more teachers in that district office to do some of this thought partnering with, and Charise has been amazing and talking through some of our strategy on what has been a recognition of our department. And I know a noticing of you guys [CRE], but what we are doing is not really working very well, strategy-wise across teams, and being able to effectively like coach teams.
>
> And that's the stress that like ED has been feeling a lot with the change in our staff and being able to support all these teams and where's our measures for change and how are we feeling? And how is it collaborating as opposed to responding all the time to stuff. So in an attempt to figure that out, we've been doing some thinking around different support and a strategy of support. And so that's why we get your time here to get your input on it, as we've been thinking about it and then talking about it for next year to those people that have like decision-making capacity, basically time on like, this is what we want to do.

Charise did not look up from her computer or acknowledge Nikki naming her as a thought partner, giving me a sense of some underlying tension. In addition, Nikki is giving coaches some insight into the internal dynamics of ED including the staff turnover as well as their lack of clarity and capacity. She also is positioning ED against the district by naming the "decision-makers," implying that there are things out of ED's power and control, and distancing ED from district dynamics. I was never clear who these decision-makers were, if she was referring to Elena as their director, or the superintendent, the cabinet, or some other entity.

This meeting really started to highlight for me the complexity of ED's position within the district. ED was recognizing their role as the district, but also that they were still struggling for leadership space in the district. For example, Nikki talked about "having some responsibility, as ED, as district" to create tools and structures for RETs and know what is happening district-wide (CRE meeting, 3.29.19). But she also kept reiterating how ED was just putting things out there, making their own tools, trying to define their role in the absence of any formal structure or guidance. One example of this was the tool, a cycle of inquiry, that they had brought to this CRE meeting for "input" from the coaches. As Nikki explains to the coaches,

> Basically from my ED side of it, it's permission given to envision and here's our plan. And basically here's our plan, here's my stance. Here's the plan. Take it or leave it. I am tired. So that is where I'm like, this is a sweet opportunity for us all to get what we need out of the district. That's where I'm hoping all this lands. (CRE meeting, 3.29.19)

Nikki's language of who the "we" included shifted throughout the meeting, sometimes indicating ED's role in the district and other times aligning more with the CRE. In the above quote Nikki's intention is to get what both the CRE and ED need from the district, recognizing that ED has been struggling. It is a complicated position to navigate and her comments highlight a sense of frustration with the district as a barrier and desire for agency in moving the work forward, similar to CRE sentiments from earlier in the day.

Enacting Differing Theories of Change

The majority of ED allotted time was spent discussing the cycle of inquiry tool they wanted to "soft roll-out" to help RETs identify and collectively engage around a problem of practice in concrete stages, aligned with the action plan. The last time ED came to "collaboratively" work on a tool it was in a pure brainstorming phase of leadership competencies, whereas this cycle was drafted, and brought to the CRE for feedback, not necessarily pure development. The coaches responded positively to the tool itself, appreciating

the work ED put in, agreeing that it would be useful to RETs and "wishing we had this before" (CRE meeting, 3.29.19). And they did have thoughts, some clarifying questions, and mostly identifying a need for a "pre-tool" process of team development and relationship building.

ED's cycle of inquiry tool was hyper focused on moving from problems to actions, picking a narrow, manageable issue and working through a process of implementation and evaluation. ED saw the central problem of RETs as "getting stuck" in PDs and too large goals such as "solving racism for African-American males" (CRE meeting, 3.29.19). Thus, they were creating a system of support, making a new tool that moves from the team self-assessment to the action plan, both previously created district tools. Their strategy involved data analysis, evaluation, and measurable outcomes. Nikki and Ben frequently used words like alignment and continuous learning.

CRE on the other hand kept speaking on ideas of leadership, team dynamics, and sustainability. Hana brought up how the model was missing a reflection tool where, "teachers, teams, school, people can reflect upon what's going on at this school who were on the team, what are the power dynamics here? Who is not on the team?" (CRE meeting, 3.29.19). She expressed concern about just jumping into data.

> Who's on our team, right? We might have a, a mom, a Somali mom and a community support worker and three IAS and a first year, second grade teacher. So we may not know how to analyze data. We might not know how to be brave about racial equity. We may not. There's just, right? This work is so complex, and it has so many pieces to it that are financial and political and emotional and personal and traumatizing and uplifting. I mean, there's so many pieces to it that it's hard for a team to move forward, even on step one, if they aren't right with themselves first, if they aren't prepared with this is kind of what we are, versus what we are here for, this is what we're going to do. We don't have all the answers, that's okay. But there's got to be some of the people part or the skills part. (CRE meeting, 3.29.19)

Emi's suggestion of needing a "people part" was echoed by several of the coaches. Lani reinforced this idea:

> I think I really like what you said about a step before the cycle. Cause that's what I'm running into with the team coaching now. Yes seriously. And it's also hard because so many of them are at different places. So I'm thinking back to the, maybe the work we did earlier before, about like developing a racial equity leader, maybe that could be there could be something even just right above that says, before you enter into this cycle, you need to develop yourself as a racial equity leader, an advocate or ally, something like that.

Lani is using her coaching experience as evidence of needing more of the skills, identity, and team development work as well as harkening back to the previous ED meeting and the racial equity leadership work that was never discussed again. Other coaches also named issues of whiteness and "readiness" for teams to actually engage effectively in RET before immediately identifying causes and action planning. For example, Taylor shared that some teams might need "a little more development perhaps before they evaluate results and all that" (CRE meeting, 3.29.19). She suggested a version of the tool that would span multiple years to think about longevity and sustainability, again noting the complexity and time needed for racial equity leadership.

Taylor, similar to Lani, also made a move to bridge the work of the CRE and ED. While Lani reminded the group that they had started a leadership competency tool that could be useful to this process, Taylor wanted ED to be informed and moving in concert with the CRE agenda:

> Another connection and I'm not sure if we've shared with you guys, but I keep bringing it up because I think it's a really good idea. But Flor brought up a few weeks ago an idea of having a coaching calendar. So thinking about what are coaches doing in the fall? What are coaches doing in the winter and the spring? And I could totally see this being used in concert with that. So if we're helping teams understand, verify causes, we're doing, maybe these activities are linking to these resources. So we've been developing that in here. It would be great to share. (CRE meeting, 3.29.19)

Taylor was specifically trying to talk across their collective coaching work and bring the two spaces into better communication. And, she is naming that they, the CRE, are already doing some of this work. Nikki kept thanking the coaches for their suggestions while Ben and Leah took notes.

Charise alerted Nikki that they were almost out of time, and so Nikki briefly introduced another tool, based on the response to intervention model, to provide "tiered support" to RETs. ED recognized that the amount of time that a school had an "official" RET did not always correlate to their developmental trajectory. Meaning, a new team might actually be more proficient in identifying racial equity concerns and working towards solutions and an established team could still be having trouble with basic equity literacy. Given their lack of capacity, they were developing a model to "triage" RET needs based on the level of support they required (CRE meeting, 3.29.19). It was a model rooted in being more efficient and effective as coaches, a role they technically both shared, even though ED staff members coached 14 schools each. ED needed a way to identify where they were most needed to maximize their capacity and get a more accurate landscape of the entire district.

There was not much time for CRE discussion, but the few comments raised concerns about institutional knowledge and relationships. The ED model of an inverted pyramid was a way to identify the level of intervention required depending on the RET tier. The coaches were hesitant about this purely interventionist approach. As Hana surfaced,

> That's what I was thinking about too with the triangle model, is just knowing that the people on the teams, including our teams and your team, are changing so often. We need some legacy of knowledge in order for teams to be successful, including just on the site-based level. So that has to be a part of the tier model because the pyramid teams will be moving through that triangle as well. So how, as they move through the triangle and they move through the years and they move through members, and they move through different [ED] employees and different CRE coaches, how is the knowledge and the work still staying alive? (Emi, CRE meeting, 3.29.19)

It was again about growth and sustainability of the leaders and work. Hana went on to say that it would be "really hard without relationships" (CRE Meeting, 3.29.19). There was a different way the CRE coaches were approaching their job of coaching. They were not entering schools to fix

problems; they were developing racial equity leaders to carry the work forward over time. It was important to the coaches to center the people, the educators like them, not just the practices.

Even though the CRE and ED had, on paper, similar goals and a shared role of coaching RETs, their theories of change diverged, adding to the relational tension. Trying to co-create tools seemed difficult when they were maybe working towards different outcomes. Nikki told the group that Leah and Ben were taking notes, that they would debrief, and follow-up with the coaches. I'm not sure that ever happened or what, if any, of the coaches' "feedback" made it into the ED tool.

Structural Tensions Impeding Collaboration

From my observations, ED was in a period of transition and trying to adjust their work to meet their own needs. And they had vastly different capacity than the CRE. ED staff were full-time district employees while the CRE coaches were full-time educators, meeting once per month with their assigned RET, and attending a collective CRE professional development day roughly every two months. ED wanted to collaborate with CRE and they intended to involve them in the process, but things were always in flux and they needed to act. Knowing what they knew, they were attempting to move forward. As Nikki explains,

> I think one of the things Charise did not want to define for you [coaches], of course, because that's who she is, is we have this opportunity as a new ED team to redefine how we're parceling out work. That's why this brain dump of, instead of us feeling like we have 14 teams, and they all meet on a Wednesday and they can only get to them twice a year, didn't really work. So Ben and I were like, before Leah got here, it was just like, okay, how can we just make teams understand that whenever they need us, they can just call on us and whoever can respond best will show up. Also loop us into your calendar, keep us involved in your notes, so we're not playing catch up every time we meet you. That's where all of this re-strategizing started from, because we were like, we're not going to be able to do our work well for anybody, it just doesn't feel right with our integrity.
>
> So I also think that the idea of you guys [CRE] being induction, does it make sense in the sense that we have teams that feel that way too, and you have teams that you're on and

> working with, and it's like, how do you want to envision your role? So we can institutionalize this as like a best practice model and a strategy over time, not just like rolling something out now. The racial equity teams are established as an idea, like now, where do you want to sit? Where is it most effective? I keep thinking about, there's no reason why ED should be holding this idea of professional development, like when you guys do incredible professional development, how can we showcase a more collaborative landscape of that and that collective knowledge idea, that we are producing a different collective knowledge strategy as well across the district. Because teams are asking about what you guys are doing and those PDs, and we keep talking about it, but whatever ... Yeah. So, I'm thinking coaching at this third-tier level, it's like, we went to Roosevelt and gave them a little bit of a landscape. What they really need next is some of your PDs, right? So why is it that they call us? We should be able to be like, here's the best coach for this response and send whoever out there and position all of us as coaches in a different way. (CRE meeting, 3.29.19)

Nikki is talking about there being an opportunity in the district chaos. They've established RETs and now they need to grow, think about what is next. And without any clear path they can "tell them [the district?] what we want" (CRE meeting, 3.29.19). There is an opening to envision something new and more collaborative with the CRE. ED recognizes the good work of the educators and wants it all to be a united front, all working together as coaches towards supporting RETs.

Hana immediately countered that they needed to be hired as full-time coaches, to which Nikki looked to Charise and said, "bargaining this summer, we'll work on it?" (CRE meeting, 3.29.19). Charise did not respond. Kat chimed in:

> Well I'm sure as shit ready to bargain for this, because I was just downstairs with Vincent [SEA president] saying, "I can't do this job and my other job, it's just not possible", [Flor and Hana affirming] so it's not going to happen until you pay us to do this work. Sorry. (CRE meeting, 3.29.19)

It was a nice idea to have this tiered system and coaching pool of both ED and CRE, but the ED team were the only ones getting paid full-time to do this work. All the coaches were full-time educators. Lani shared that she "wasn't ready to leave her classroom, yet" but they did discuss some options of regional coaching and partial appointments to do more of the systems-level

coaching work. The point was, they needed more time and more pay to make it happen, and it was the district who needed to make it happen. Nikki mentioned that she had some "access to funds" to continue this conversation, get some folks together, and think more about this "with pay" (Nikki, CRE meeting, 3.29.19). Again, she said ED would follow-up. I did see that Nikki sent an email to the coaches sending all of the documents they discussed, thanking them for their time, and asking for more feedback (Email, 4.5.19). ED did adapt the cycle of inquiry to include an "internal" (team) and "external" (school) problem of practice in an attempt to address the CRE concerns about team dynamics and development. Liz was the only one to respond (reply all) to that email and indicate her availability for a brainstorming session. By the end of my data collection 9 months later, this official gathering had not occurred.

Charise stood up and Nikki acknowledged that they were out of time. Right as Charise was walking towards her to facilitate the next portion of the meeting, and coaches began chatting with each other, Nikki quickly addressed the lack of communication at the previous institute.

> That's it. Thank you, guys. I also wanted to say, I know we were supposed to do a Zoom about the last institute. We got lost in doing [district] board training and that just didn't happen, but it's not lost. So if you have input, I might just send out an email from the last one. Just let everyone chime in, because we haven't even sat down to talk about it, the segregated space activity. Thanks, Charise. (CRE meeting, 3.29.19)

Charise did not even acknowledge Nikki's comment and immediately told the group "there is a whole chunk of stuff we are not going to get through today, or at least not in the way we planned it (CRE meeting, 3.29.19). Indicating that ED had overstayed their time and they had work to do. Charise even asked Nikki, Ben, and Leah to go use her office to debrief instead of staying in the room with the CRE coaches. Throughout Nikki kept naming Charise as a collaborator, a thought partner, "a kind voice in her ear" but the interactions coming from Charise were cordial, yet terse. She did not respond to any of Nikki's compliments and avoided eye contact. ED was a

guest in the CRE space. Charise had given them time at the meeting, as requested, but now it was time to go.

Relational Rupture Entrenches Organizational Boundaries

After suppressing her emotions and remaining distant during the ED team's presentation, Charise had hit some sort of breaking point and all the secret district dynamics and relational tension came spilling out to the coaches shortly after ED left the room. Charise shared how she was not part of the last institute planning and how it felt like similar dynamics of being excluded from the institutes that happened prior to Elena. But now even with Elena and Nikki, she was being left out and "worried" that they had already planned the institutes without her and thus, without the CRE. Specifically, Charise felt she had been uninvited from the ED staff meetings, the primary space where they discussed upcoming institutes. As Charise recounted to the coaches,

Charise: I'm also not invited to all their meetings anymore.

Kat: What?

Charise: ED. Yeah. At one point I was invited to all their meetings and I was regularly going and now I'm not invited to all their meetings anymore. And so I don't know what's discussed in those meetings.

Aditi: Wasn't that part of the accountability mechanism, was that you...

Charise: The system always re-corrects itself.

Liz: Nikki even said that was part of the bargaining.

Aditi: It is. It's supposed to be.

Charise: So, me being in their staff meeting is not required. Me co-creating this [holding a previous institute agenda] is. And me being part of thinking about how we determine whether or not teams get to move forward or at least, I guess the more formal thinking is "guidance", like who gives guidance moving forward. And that was really a way to put in some accountability, because up until then the partnership committee could just do something random inside with or without CRE with or without ED.

> Actually probably *with* ED and *without* CRE. And I was like, "Nah, we're going to make sure that that's not going to happen."
>
> But I don't, they don't have to invite me to their staff meetings. It was extremely useful when I was and they would also invite me to their retreats, extremely useful, because then it actually felt like you were creating what this is going to look like. Right? And, and then, all of a sudden, there was well, "But we also have some internal staff stuff to talk about so you can't come to all meetings." That sort of stuff started happening.

Charise unloaded so much pent-up frustration that clarified the terse ED interactions and how the relationship had been dissolving over the past few months. Even though the ED and CRE collaboration for institutes was mainly Charise and Elena, it was still something that, in Charise's mind, was co-created. She was the broker and boundary spanner bringing the needs of the coaches and CRE into the district.

But something had happened that fractured this relationship with Elena. Rather than a singular incident, it was a series of slights and omissions that compounded and cascaded towards this eventual rupture. Now Charise had stopped being invited to ED meetings and she had a hunch they were planning institutes without her. Charise rolled her eyes as she recounted Elena's claim that it was just "internal staff stuff" that caused her exclusion from ED meetings (CRE meeting, 3.29.19). Charise had ample evidence to remain suspicious of the district and given the earlier dynamics of "gatekeeping" with ED, it seemed like another excuse. "The system always re-corrects itself" (Charise, CRE meeting, 3.29.19).

The coaches (and I) were shocked to hear this revelation. The checks and balances of the contract, the accountability mechanisms, were being subverted. This conversation between Charise and the coaches was no longer about ED collaboration, thought partnership, or collective district-wide knowledge, it had become about their institutional identities and compliance. In the absence of formal structures or collaborative processes between ED and CRE it became evident

that the “co-created” institutes were leveraging the informal relationships between Elena, Charise, and Nikki. And without the only boundary crossing routine of Charise joining ED meetings, there was nothing sustaining their fragile district-union partnership.

The coaches were uninterested in maintaining the “collaboration” facade. They were preparing to give ED an ultimatum.

Lani: Well, I vote we never let them do a ED only workshop.

Kat: Or we're not there.

Lani: "You can come to us." Oh yeah, we don't have to be there.

Liz: Actually, yeah.

Lani: You can come to us and we will plan it together. So that's what I feel.

To the CRE, it was not a difficult request. The way the last institute occurred should not have happened and ED knew better. As Charise expressed,

> All they had to say was, "What are your thoughts?" It'd be like, "Oh, well, da, da, da." And if I just was like, "Okay," they'd be like, "Cool." There wouldn't be any ... I mean, so one of the other things that was messed up, and this is how you know, this is how you know that they knew better. Every single one of them individually, even Deborah, and separate from each other, apologized. Before I said a thing about us not being included.

ED’s admission of guilt, by way of private apology, only furthered the distrust. Whether excluding the CRE from the all-team institute was intentional or not, the impact was the same, and lines were being drawn.

Content Creation as Setting the Agenda

Amidst the relational tensions with ED, the CRE put forth a new strategy to ensure their position and role in the leadership of RETs. Specifically, this strategy relied on creating racial equity professional development content first, to establish CRE priorities and set the agenda. Charise brought this up almost as leverage, that if the CRE had something already created, she

could use it to drive their goals. Charise remarked that if she met with Elena again about the institutes, she wanted to have something in hand to say,

> Oh, that's interesting. Well, the coaches actually want to do it this way. Or the coaches have actually identified that that's not going to be a quality way of doing it. And because the contract says that you have to co-do it, she can't override me. (3.29.19)

In particular, the existence of the contract was again an accountability mechanism that was becoming more important given the lack of boundary crossing structures and relationships. And Charise needed something tangible to present as the CRE agenda.

For example, the CRE knew they did not need ED to make good professional development. If anything, they had experienced success, creating “better” PD that educators and schools were specifically requesting. And if ED wasn’t going to include them in the institutes, they were fired up to go it alone.

Kat: So do we have an opportunity to design?

Charise: Well, design it as much as possible so that when I'm in a room and she [Elena] saying things like, "Our team also designed this." I can be like, "Ours is better."

Kat: So I have an idea that would be, and it doesn't have to be right now, but sometime. I guess it could be right now. But to like, not looking at this [last year’s institute agenda], what would our version look like? And then maybe we have something to then say, if we did it, this is what it will look like. If you do it, this is what it looks like. Because it really is whoever shows up with the thing is setting the agenda.

Liz: Then it's like we're not ancillary.

The coaches were tired of being on the margins. The institutes were a chance to have agency and power in the district racial equity leadership space. The CRE wanted to be the ones setting the agenda and they knew that meant they needed to have a concrete plan, a product to present. They spent over an hour of their second to last CRE meeting designing the next institute, building off

of their morning reflections, and incorporating the feedback from RETs about more time to work on action plans and cross-team activities. They envisioned what they would want to do without any barriers or restrictions of the district.

Unfortunately, the CRE did not actually have the power to implement their EDm institute. The coaches spent nearly half their day talking about RET institutes, and while it was perhaps generative to imagine and create together, the district would ultimately make the final decisions. Charise recognized that the institutes were largely out of their control, asking the coaches to tell her "the most important thing to fight for," knowing that they would have to compromise, if they were even consulted at all (CRE meeting, 3.29.19). As she said before, a meeting wasn't even scheduled.

The competitive dynamic of "who gets there first" and being "better" only solidified the adversarial relationship with ED. What was perhaps poor planning or lack of time on ED's part became perceived as intentional moves to maintain the status-quo. ED joining the CRE meeting could have been a meaningful time to confront the tension and work to build some understanding towards relational repair. Instead, it was largely ignored causing the tensions to fester. Each CRE conversation reified the oppositional dynamics and the schism between ED and CRE only became deeper.

Defining Boundaries and Carving Spaces to Co-Exist

The last Saturday institute of the year took place at a local high school. All of the RETs were gathered in the cafeteria, sitting around round tables, with a stage in the front of the room. This time Charise was ready for the introduction. Charise and Elena stood next to each other on the stage while Elena introduced her team. Charise took the microphone from Elena to do her own introduction.

> I'm Charise, Director for the Seattle Education Association Center for Racial Equity. As I've told many of you already, it's important to remember that I am an educator, and this will be my 10th year. I taught for 7 years. All of the coaches are teachers or educators and have their own role and places they work. [Charise calls everyone's name as they stand or wave].
>
> One of the things that happened last time, at the last institute, was some confusion of our different roles and who we are. Some of y'all weren't here for all the sessions or the different panels. So I just want to make sure it is clear that the coaches are all educators just like you. The coaches are all people who had the same passion as you did, and they started to get involved, they started to see different schools, they started to coach, to partner, to join different committees like ethnic studies, join RET, leading RETs in their schools, leading workshops all over our district and even our state. And now hopefully you can see you are also able to move into those influential roles to change our system. So that was the whole point of creating the Center for Racial Equity and starting the coaches program. So I'm really excited they are here today, and they are going to be leading two different workshops, so check them out. (RET institute, 4.20.19)

Charise came to set the record straight. Coaches were not the same as ED staff. They were educators, "just like you" and were meant to be role models, to show that educators can be systems leaders (RET institute, 4.20.19). Her affirmations of who the coaches are and what they do implicitly positioned ED as the opposite.

Elena swiftly took the microphone from Charise, "alright, let's give a hand to all the schools that are here…" (Elena, RET Institute, 4.20.19). Neither Elena nor Charise thanked each other or explicitly acknowledged that they were partners in the RET work. Elena made one comment that they were "at a tipping point of 50% of the district," meaning that half the schools in the district had RETs. "Our goal, Charise and I talk about, is 104 [all schools]" (Elena, RET institute, 4.20.19). The comment struck me because it was the exact district fear that Charise had shared with the coaches in a previous meeting and now it was being shared to a room full of educators as a joint goal. Another indicator of the disconnect between Charise and Elena.

The institute itself had little resemblance to the institute the coaches had designed. ED lead and facilitated all portions of the day including a panel Q&A session with a High School

RET, an established team and often lauded school that presented the previous year as well. Serena was on the panel as an educator on the RET. I think in an effort to include the CRE, Nikki sent an email to the coaches prior to the institute with a "support ask" (Email, 4.15.19). ED was requesting that CRE coaches collect questions from the audience and screen them for the panel to answer. None of the coaches replied to the email publicly[20]. I did not consider collecting slips of paper and running them up to the facilitators as a meaningful leadership activity.

Of the six breakout workshop sessions running concurrently during the institute, the CRE was responsible for two. Rita, Taylor, and Hana had created an equity literacy "create and sustain" workshop and Lani provided her workshop on "multicultural children's literature. This was again a ED-centric institute but the CRE was at least aware of the agenda and had carved out two distinct spaces for individual coaches to lead. Moving forward, collaboration in the case of the CRE and ED meant attempting to co-exist in the racial equity leadership space, an endeavor that would continue to be fraught with tension.

The limits of leveraging relationships in lieu of structures

During my CRE observations I recall frequently wondering "where is ED?" How can these folks collaborate if they are never even in the same room or even speaking to each other? I kept looking for spaces where both groups might show up, or places for the joint-activity to occur. But I realized there were no formal systems, processes or structures set up to enable an authentic partnership. Instead, the CRE and ED collaboration was contingent on individual relationships that were constantly being tested and coming into conflict with broader organizational dynamics.

[20] Someone could have responded to Nikki directly and not used "reply all"

For example, Charise attending ED staff meetings bolstered the individual relationship she had with Elena and her team. As discussed above, it was the only routine that was enabling their co-planning of Saturday Institutes. However, when Elena "uninvited" Charise from those staff meetings, there were no longer any boundary crossing structures to preserve the relationship or collaboration. Elena shared that the intent was to meet weekly internally with her Equity Department (ED) and once a month in partnership between the Equity Department and Charise; however through technical scheduling, the invitation Charise received included her on the weekly ED team meetings instead of just a monthly collaborative meeting. The ED had many new staff members who needed weekly time together to norm and focus on central office expansion, thus the invites were corrected. The impact of that decision to change the invites from weekly to monthly lead Charise to interpret the move as being "uninvited." While Elena maintained that this was not personal, and a move she needed to take as a leader to get her own "house" in order to "keep the ED focused and support internal conflicts," the unintended consequence of that act severed a key pathway of knowledge and site of decision-making for the CRE. As Elena shared, "when I cut it off, that access to people and things, it made it seem like, I think to her [Charise], that I was cutting off everything, which wasn't my intent at all." From Charise's perspective, without attending ED meetings, there was no longer access to the district.

I heard several times from both Ben and Nikki, how ED didn't have any set times or processes for collaboration with the CRE. It impacted the ability to "co-create" institutes and to collectively lead RETs. In lieu of structures or systems for collaboration, the ED staff largely leveraged Nikki's relationship with Charise and the coaches. Nikki's position was already designed to cross boundaries as a union member within ED. But it was her personal, community-based relationship with Charise that was often relied upon and "leaned on." Ben shared how all

communication was happening through informal pathways and how, “Nikki became the only bridge.”

But that singular relational bridge was competing with serious structural barriers and issues of capacity. Specifically, the on-going tension in the RET work between the full-time capacity of ED and the six times a year the CRE coaches convened. Ben elaborates on this tension:

> **Ben**: The upcoming institute would be another good example. So Charise came to our staff meeting and we did a brainstorming, kind of came to a general idea, which is awesome. Then who does the work of turning the idea into an institute? Us.
>
> **Aditi**: Yeah. Is that on ED?
>
> **Ben**: Yeah, because we have capacity, so there's no bitterness about it. But then there is this like, damned if you do, damned if you don't. Damned if we do it because it's not collaborative, because there's been no intentional space created for collaboration or how can we pay the CREs? Or they're delivering all this PD. Do they even have time or energy to do this stuff or they want to, I don't know. I don't even know if they want to. And then if we don't, there's no institute.
>
> **Aditi**: Yeah.
>
> **Ben**: I mean the event won't happen. So we tentatively, cautiously move forward and then the tension is reproduced at each institute without getting to like the source of the problem. (11.22.19)

The management of RETs were only a portion of ED’s overall scope of work, however, the amount of time ED had available to dedicate to the leadership of RETs was still exponentially more than the CRE coaches, even though Charise had joined the ED staff meeting again, at least on this occasion. Consequently, ED had the capacity to create the majority of tools and evaluation processes. In addition, ED’s position and location within the district meant they were required to take up this work, as district employees, to ensure the work happened. As such, there

was a constant tension for ED trying to gingerly walk the line of not asking too much of the coaches but also including CRE enough in the leadership process.

And there was a disconnect for the CRE between their vision for racial equity leadership and the structures to enable it. They were attempting to elevate the expertise of educators of color to have a real impact in systems leadership, while starting with a fraction of the resources and capacity. As I describe later in the chapter, this on-going dynamic shaped the goals of the CRE and created a sharp focus on attaining more resources to realize their leadership aims.

Bargaining Process Shaping the CRE Leadership Activity

Negotiating the collective bargaining agreement is perhaps the most pivotal responsibility between a teachers union and a school district. And it is a process that magnifies all of the organizational relationships and tensions. While I was not able to observe the act of bargaining, the organizational dynamics that are produced and re-produced through this process permeate beyond the discrete practice of contract negotiation. And importantly, it is a process that shaped the role and goals of the CRE.

After all of this relational fallout, and without any new institutes or district trainings on the horizon, the CRE focus became the role of coaches and visioning the future of the CRE for the next school year and beyond. Specifically, a new district-union contract would be negotiated in September and as Charise told the coaches, “in bargaining right now, everything is up for grabs” (CRE meeting, 5.31.19).

Educators not Martyrs: Contract as respect and legitimacy for the CRE

Even though most of the coaches were not part of the bargaining team, their work, as the CRE, was heavily shaped by the contract and shaping the contract. The contract outlined the scope of work (i.e. number of RETs, PD days, schedule), partnership and decision-making

structures (i.e. joint meetings, who decides PD content, composition of decision-making bodies such as Building Leadership Teams, and use of equity analysis tools), and importantly the funding. Using bargaining to embed their work into the contract helped institutionalize the CRE as an integral component of the union and the district and make racial equity a priority. As Charise remarked, "let's be real, racial equity is in the contract because of the CRE" (CRE meeting, 5.31.19). Importantly, what got decided in the bargain, particularly around funding, had real implications for the resources and capacity of the CRE, an existing point of tension as discussed above. For example, educator pay is negotiated through the contract as they are district employees. Thus, coaches being paid on a small stipend (through union money) as opposed to a salaried .2 or .5 position meant that they could not coach more than one RET outside of their full-time educator role. The union did have structures to provide additional financial support through grants and membership dues (as they have done), but the collective bargaining agreement was the primary mechanism to get money from the district.

As soon as conversations moved to bargaining, it was no longer about a "district-wide" vision of racial equity or collaboration between CRE and ED. It was now a union-district, synonymous with labor-management, relationship. And as I describe below, from the CRE perspective, if the district wanted the CRE to do more labor, they needed to pay for it. This was particularly relevant to the case of the RETs, as they were being rolled out in schools by the district but the CRE was expected to support the initiative through providing professional development and coaching teams, both considered district jobs that the district was failing at (CRE meetings, 5.31.19). They were creating content and offering services that they believed the district was unable to provide effectively.

The coaches felt this tension of understanding the importance of building up the racial equity literacy of educators towards broader goals of education justice and they wanted to be valued and respected as legitimate professionals and leaders. They were educators, not martyrs. As Taylor asks, "Are we letting the district off the hook? Are we doing that thing that teachers do where we just fill in the gap, that we are martyrs?" (CRE meeting, 5.31.19). It was not that the coaches didn't want to do the work, they were already doing it. But having the district pay was a matter of principle. The budget was a reflection of the district priorities and when the district wants something, "they find the money" (CRE meetings, 5.31.19).

Tensions of "what we want" vs. "what we can get"

As the impending bargain neared, I noticed how the CRE conversations shifted to be increasingly oppositional towards the district and constrained by what could be negotiated in the contract. The collective bargaining agreement is a vital function of the union and as previously discussed, SEA viewed it is a critical mechanism for accountability. And to the union it fundamentally represented district values and commitments, both financially as it governs resource allocation and symbolically how the district values expertise and leadership of educators, particularly educators of color. However, narrowly focusing goals based on the CBA may have limited the power and possibility of the CRE towards expansive notions of racial justice leadership. Specifically, I observed a tension in attempting to imagine their roles and vision of the CRE (what we want) versus identifying priorities that could be negotiated and won (what we can get).

For example, visioning conversations often began from and were framed within the bargaining context. In one activity Charise asked the coaches to brainstorm all the categories of work they do as CRE coaches; however, she introduced the activity by describing the potential

contract issues such as changes to racial equity teams, discontinuing Saturday institutes, and introducing a regional model of coaching. As such, the brainstorm was being driven by Charise's question of "what our role might be" in response to this changing district environment (5.31.19). Interestingly, coaches identified areas of work that were broader than their contractually defined role such as serving as advocates, liaisons, and equity consultants. They talked about their role as developing "equity leaders who are change agents" and providing a "network of support" (5.31.19). Folks like Flor said they wished they could do this racial equity work full time.

The coaches recognized how much they actually did and how difficult it was to capture their work because "it just pervades all the work, always" (Emi, 5.31.19). Yet, Charise needed coaches to rein it in and prioritize what they could realistically do with the capacity they had. As she reflected,

> I think this is the nature of when a project or program is created, and certainly it was created to fill a need. I think we did that pretty clearly by coaching teams, but then when our skills grew, you could provide different things, saw that we would, asked if we would, then that became something that we were going to do. As the district started partnering with us, what they were working on became things that we were all of a sudden starting to also do, creating again another need. Our first need was coach teams. Okay. Check. Got that. Then it was like, Dang district, you don't know what they [educators] need. Okay, so then we created content. Delivery of content came hand in hand
> […]
> These things came piece by piece, but I think a lot of it was because we were filling needs. Then once we filled the needs, we realized what needs we had in order to be more successful in filling that need. That's a very different development than if we were creating this [CRE] and once we got there, that's what we do. (5.31.19)

Importantly, Charise is naming that tension of how the CRE grew in response to the district and the needs that emerged as a result of the bargain. And how that framing is a very different starting point that if they had been able to develop and vision the CRE (with adequate resources) first. She continued,

> Now, we're in a spot where, and this is not a "no" that we're not going to get paid full [time], but I can't figure it out under the union. There may be ways to figure that out, but I can't do it under the union. So in that way, I hate to say this, but we have to prioritize. Our [CRE] capacity is not there to do all of these things. And even if, for instance, it was a matter of just bringing in people, well then, the funding might not be there, or at least may not be sustainably there. (5.31.19)

In particular, Charise is signaling to the coaches that there are limits to what she thinks is possible within the union. In these excerpts, Charise is responding to the organizational dynamics and the ways those boundaries with both the union and the district are shaping the work of the CRE by dictating structures such as funding. She's trying to distill the interests of this group, so she has something to report out and advocate for in the bargaining process. Charise keeps asking the coaches to define "what is a CRE coach" and there is a back and forth exchange:

> **Hana:** We're bad asses who do whatever they need to do
>
> **Charise**: Yeah… that's not going to work

Charise is clear that she is not trying to crush the hopes of coaches, but she is attending to the reality of the program and considering the sustainability within the district-union context. "I don't want to set us up for failure and I don't want to burn everyone out" (Charise, 5.31.19).

I felt this conflict in the CRE space of trying to assert their own agency yet feeling reactive and powerless in their institutional context. This was particularly prevalent in the CRE retreat, the last gathering that occurred prior to the collective bargain. Consequently, the majority of the CRE conversations centered on the district and specifically funding. As one of the coaches remarked, "the nature of the work changes because of funding" (8.12.19). Charise wanted to use the fact that there was "a lot up in the air" with the bargain as the impetus for the coaches to re-envision what the CRE could be because "it was a strategic opportunity…our clear direction has

more power in deciding how it's going to be, because no one else has decided it for us""

(Charise, 8.12.19). Priya clarified:

> **Priya**: So just want to check in if I processed this right. So we have three things. We're going to figure out what we are absolutely doing?
>
> **Charise**: Yes
> **Priya**: And then, correct me if I'm wrong, then we'll figure out what it is we're specifically asking the district for based on that vision?
>
> **Charise**: mmmhmmm
>
> **Priya**: Do we also need to come up with the third thing about what is our bottom line? What we'll settle for? Not preferable language but…
>
> **Charise**: Yup, sounds good.

Charise's intention was to start from the CRE priorities, but the conversation immediately turned back to the district and evaluation processes. Charise tried again:

> All right. I'm going to flip the script all together right now. This was a conversation I had recently about how to get back to that joy. Because when this was all created, it was out certainly urgency, certainly want, right? But it was created out of a joy, and right now, it feels responsive rather than creative. One of the very first questions I asked is, what is the change we can create together, right? So, forget everything you just talked about the last 45 minutes. My question is this. No. Before I ask the question.
>
> When I first started, I told the district, "We're going to do this with or without you." Let's get back to that. There're too many changes going on in the district. It's difficult to manage and strategize around. Fuck the district. What are we going to do as educator leaders with other educator leaders, especially all of the other educator leaders who are ducking their head and doing what's right and don't yet have a space to be with our community? Let's think about it that way. Fuck the district. Fuck contract. Don't even, just... [inaudible]. What are we going to do to make sure that we have more educators doing this type of work that we're all sitting here ready to do? Let's think about it in that way.

The conversations kept ping-ponging between these agentic, empowering statements of "fuck the district" and "getting back to the joy" and wanting to nurture leaders; then immediately shifting back to RETs, regional coaching models, and system critiques. Specifically, all the

organizational contradictions and dynamics kept interjecting. Coaches wanted the district to pay them for their work but if "they [district] fund it they will co-opt it" (CRE Retreat, 8.12.19). The union was no better. They couldn't get the union to pay because there "wasn't the political will." Charise also shared how she was unable to hire a staff or stay the Director because CRE positions needed to be elected with term limits, all union politics that made it hard to sustain the work. There were so many forces constraining the CRE and Charise was airing some frustration that SEA and broader union policies were also limitations. As she told the coaches "This work has always been positioned in between union politics and district politics" (Charise, 8.12.19). And the collective bargaining process heightened all of it.

What struck me the most was how these conversations within the CRE contrasted with my interviews and the ways coaches imagined the possibilities of the CRE. For example, Lani talked about the CRE being a "community-based hub" (12.2.19). Serena dreamed it would be a space for learning and growing, open to staff and students, encouraging people who are "dedicated to the work to go further in the work." She talked about "training young people to do this work, I think that would be truly radical. I want to see some radical things happening" (Serena, 12.10.19).

In particular, Liz beautifully expressed a hope for the CRE that existed outside of the current system. She mused,

> I feel like there's something else out there and I feel like to think outside the box I don't know what that is, because I've been in the system so long, so it's like, I go back to these... Within the system, I would love to be an entity that did start branching out and thinking about doing things outside of the system to start to make change, disrupt, but also make it better. Make it bigger and better. I would love to see CRE be able to do that. I know that's abstract, but I just think that I own that what I know is the system. So if CRE could be this space where I could start thinking more creatively and outside the box and the system. Enabling and empowering people to speak their truth and change things how they are, and to have their stories be honored and known. Especially kids of staff and kids who are in it right now and adults who've been in the system.

Liz is illuminating such a core complexity, trying to imagine beyond the system she knows. What else could be outside of the district or the union? And yet, coaches are trying to sustain themselves and this work within an oppressive institutional context. Serena speaks to this struggle,

> I recognize that I have a lot of criticisms of the work that's happening where it's not happening. I think any of us that have the criticisms that we've had have been because we care very deeply about this work. This is not a side project for any of us. I think this is very integral to who we are. When these systems aren't set up for us to do this work sustainably, there's only so much power that we have to overturn them when gates have been kept shut for so long. I have really high expectations for what this work is and what it should look like, but that's because it really matters. It should not be done lightheartedly or without lots and lots of support. You cannot ask people to do this work without giving them all the support that they need because this work has not been done at these levels before. It's almost like nonsensical.

Serena is echoing the same sentiments that I heard all year from the coaches. These women of color were so tired in this system. They were leaders who needed authentic support to be well and realize their dreams. And yet, the organizational boundaries and dynamics meant that "support" was often framed and confined within a familiar union-district resource driven logic. Thus, expansive visions of racial equity leadership and their agency to enact leadership beyond the CRE may have been constrained by the process of collective bargaining.

Bargaining as the Flashpoint of District-Union Boundary Dynamics

The CRE-ED racial equity partnership existed within an already tenuous union-district dynamic that only became more fragile as a result of the relational ruptures detailed above. And the institutional process of bargaining reified and only solidified the boundary between the CRE and ED as they reverted to their union and district identities. Specifically, bargaining was a cyclical process of callouts, blaming, and "finger pointing" (Elena Interview, 12.8.19).

As a community member I witnessed two bargains play out in the public and it was vicious. There were social media posts about "racist teachers" and "racist principals". Both the union and the district reaching out to community groups to curry favor. One actual strike and a second threat of strike with parents panicking about what they would do with their children. I read all the sweeping generalizations in the media that the district doesn't care about kids because they won't pay teachers and teachers don't care about kids because they are choosing to strike.[21] As Elena lamented, the bargain just "puts everyone in a positional power place. And then we spend a whole year repairing that relationship, and then we get two years of 'okay, let's work together,' and then went back to it all over again" (12.8.19).

The CRE was operating within this union-district paradigm and while they did want district resources, they actually were not that keen on a partnership, or at least an equal partnership. The CRE wanted to lead and to be recognized and resourced to do so. As Charise's "fuck the district" response indicates, they were attempting to take a up new space in racial equity leadership and the priority would be the collective work of the CRE. According to the coaches, the district was a barrier to racial equity work. The CRE just wanted the district to give them money and "get out of the way" (8.14.19). As Charise frequently stated, "we don't need the district to do what we do" and "we never needed them," it was the district that needed the CRE. The CRE, as educators of color, were the ones with the knowledge and expertise and they largely did not see much value added by partnership with the district. As such, it is unsurprising that Elena and ED were rarely invited into the CRE space as collaboration as that was not the CRE's

[21] https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/education/seattle-school-board-to-consider-legal-action-if-teachers-strike/

goal. The partnership itself was transactional, an instrumental pathway to the expansion of CRE leadership and agency in the district.

Unfortunately, the CRE felt they did not hold the power to do what they needed to do, as the district primarily controlled resources and decision-making around education policy and practice. And as the CRE kept trying to assert themselves, to elevate their expertise, and legitimize their experiences in the oppressive district context, they were "dissing" the district, and specifically ED, in the process. As Elena remarked, "okay you don't need us, but what does that mean for a partnership?" (Interview, 12.9.19). Ben named being hurt by this dynamic, that what ED produced was useless and that what the CRE does is "the real stuff" (Interview, 11.22.19).

As the last chapter highlighted, what the CRE had was special. They had built a politicized trust with each other and while they did want more agency in racial equity leadership, they also did not want to give up their collective and independent identity. They knew how the district worked and were wary of their being "co-opted" or "appropriated" (Taylor, 11.21.19) by entering the "institutionalized whiteness" (Flor, 12.2.19) of the district. For the CRE, bargaining became this primary site of contestation that would afford or foreclose their leadership possibilities.

Beyond Bargaining: Mistrust fills the Void

The institutional environment in the district was always changing and as Charise highlighted, the work of the CRE was shifting as well. The CRE was taking up new work and attempting to expand their role in racial equity leadership, but the relationships, structures, and processes were not yet built to realize their aims. Nikki reflected on the changing context of their work:

> I've heard that it [partnership] was really cool, but I think it started out as this beautiful space to have those of us who are doing racial equity work have some safe space to see and acknowledge each other and get some like fill. And I think just because the way the capacity of the program has gone, like now we're huge, and not everyone feels that same way, and not everyone is able to collect in the same way, but the supports around the system haven't changed. It's still the same way it was when it started, except that was a real grassroots effort, and there wasn't the politics in the middle of it, and there wasn't a ton of people trying to be... it's like so many cooks in the kitchen, and so many different diners at this point, that we're a restaurant now, and not just a dinner table. It's just like, that's changed, and you don't have anyone at the helm. (11.22.19)

Folks invested in racial equity work were previously on the margins and were seeking "safe" spaces to build community. But now racial equity (at least the language) had proliferated and become part of policy and shaping practice. It was no longer just a grassroots effort; it was institutional towards systematic transformation. With increased scope, scale, and varying priorities they required new structures and processes but there wasn't the corresponding infrastructure to meet the new needs of the individuals engaging in the work.

Critically, without those supports in place and contention over leadership "mistrust fills the void" (Nikki, 11.22.19). The politics of the district-union dynamics, the histories of mistrust and harm, played out in the micro moments and interactions. For example, Elena's move to exclude Charise from ED meetings reinforced her positional power to control district decision-making space. Ben recognized that the "catalyzing" institute that marked a turning point for the CRE was a misstep by ED. He remembered thinking that the CRE was "tense" and only later learned that they had not only been cut out of the institute process but that the CRE coaches had personal relationships with the RETs that should have been honored. As he shared, "So that makes a lot of sense to me why they were annoyed at being invisible and feeling dismissed and hurt and distrustful. So that seems like a big misstep on ED's part to not have involved the CRE, if not put the CRE in charge" (Ben, 11.22.19. The incidents only furthered the CRE's distrust and they had countless examples to affirm their stance.

A particularly significant blow came when Charise got word of Elena leaving her position as ED director to be promoted in the district. Charise informed the coaches, "Elena is moving up, nobody said it, but we all know it" (CRE meeting, 5.31.19). She shared the news with a slightly annoyed nonchalance to her tone, like she couldn't really be bothered. It was what they had come to expect from the district. And yet, it would still impact the CRE. "Who will be the new ED director? How will that affect us? I don't have time to rebuild a relationship and partnership" (Charise, CRE meeting, 5.31.19). Elena did end up moving up in the district during that summer before the new school year, a move that she recognized as contributing to the hurt with Charise (Elena Interview, 12.8.19).

Though Charise did not have the time to rebuild with someone new, the formalized partnership in the contract did give the CRE a certain level of protection. The partnership was no longer predicated on individual relationships, ED would be mandated to work (in some capacity) with the CRE. As Charise explained, "We have a whole lot of stuff in our contract that says that ED and CRE need to partner. So whoever comes on as ED director will need to figure out how to make time for me" (Charise, CRE Meeting, 9.23.19). In lieu of any relationship, that contract was a place of power the CRE could leverage.

Though the relationship with Elena had significantly deteriorated, she was still a known element on the ED team, and they still had Nikki and Ben. This would be the first time that a ED director would be hired external to the district and existing relationships. Interestingly, Charise was on the hiring committee, however, she still expressed a fear that the new director would try to shake things up and enforce a "hierarchy" in the department, overriding the present ED employees (CRE meeting, 9.23.19). With no reason to trust the district, and with more evidence of the unreliability of ED, this new hiring process was met with deep suspicion from the CRE.

The new director, Manal, was a woman of color but her positionality as an "outsider" and soon to be district employee automatically had their guard up.

> I think the district has brought her on as someone who might be able to do cross-department work. Which makes me wonder what her idea, or interest in working in the schools, or with educators, is. I don't know. I just don't know. (Charise, CRE meeting, 9.23.19).

Charise even told the coaches to "keep an eye out" (CRE meeting, 9.23.19). In addition, I heard this idea several times, that "Manal doesn't care about educators" (CRE meeting, 12.14.19). She was coming to the school district from the Department of Transportation, but she was previously an educator, a fact that most of the coaches were unaware of, and I actually informed them of during a meeting (CRE meeting, 12.14.19). But the rumors were already flying with coaches saying they heard that Manal was "anti-teacher," "anti-union," and had an "anti-teacher bias" (CRE meeting, 12.14.19). The positioning of "not an educator" was already a well-established narrative of district employees from the union, much of the language mirroring the bargain. Once again, the organizational boundaries were shaping and being shaped by the relational dynamics in an always evolving yet entrenched institutional context that would continue to inform the leadership of the CRE.

Conclusion: The limits of individual relationships in the face of shifting organizational boundaries

I provide this detailed account of a relational rupture over time to illuminate the ways organizational dynamics were shaping the collective leadership activity of the CRE. Specifically, the process of bargaining set in motion particular union-district assumptions, positionings, and dynamics that permeated well beyond the designated negotiation timeframe. Importantly, organizational boundaries between the CRE and ED/SPS were not static but instead shifted over time to become more entrenched and oppositional, particularly in proximity to bargain.

Organizational dynamics such as the district's lack of recognition of educator expertise and control over access, resources, and decision-making spaces, ended up constraining the CRE's agency to expansively imagine racial equity leadership as broader than a collective bargaining agreement. As described in the previous chapter, the CRE had built an understanding of the critical historicity, re-whitening, course-correcting of the district. No matter the intent of ED actions, the CRE was experiencing and interpreting the dynamics as "the district" re-inscribing its power.

In addition, the CRE maintained their politicized trust amongst themselves, but this did not extend to ED or the district. Instead, there appeared to be greater mistrust between the CRE and the district, particularly in relation to the bargain. Arguably, there had been some individual racialized or politicized trust cultivated between Charise, Elena, and Nikki. It was perhaps initially enough to engage in a new leadership relationship, but without structures or systems to attend to the broader organizational dynamics, that boundary-crossing politicized trust was not maintained or sustained. In sum, organizational boundaries were both evolving and consequential as the CRE attempted to lead systems-level change. Specifically, those boundaries reasserted themselves to reify dominant union-district dynamics that ultimately limited the CRE's ability to collectively exert influence beyond the CRE.

Chapter 6: Discussion and Implications

In this dissertation, I explored the formation of the CRE. I sought to understand how a racial-equity focused center within a teachers union enacted leadership and the role of politicized trust and organizational boundaries in shaping their leadership activities. I presented the case of a teachers union that pushed beyond the traditional role of a union to enact equity-focused leadership towards school and district reform. Through the creation of the Center for Racial Equity the union formalized the leadership of educators of color, specifically women of color, by elevating their knowledge and expertise in systems-level change. I argue that the CRE became a site of systems focused leadership, however the dynamics of racialized boundaries limited their transformative agency. As a collective, the CRE educators advanced politicized trust as an alternative approach to racial justice leadership. In this chapter, I discuss these findings and place this study in conversation with the framing literature and conceptual framework. I conclude with implications for research, theory, and practice.

CRE as site of systems-focused collective leadership

Through SEA's concerted effort to de-silo educators of color and the intentional relationship building from leaders like Charise, the CRE became a powerful site of transformation for these racial equity focused educators. They collectively cultivated "the well": a sacred space (Pour-Khorshid, 2018) of care and nourishment that both validated their experiences of harm and racial battle fatigue (Smith, 2009) as women of color in a white supremacist system and provided the relational solidarity to fortify and sustain themselves to remain in the work. Akin to the literature on critical professional development, teacher-led networks, and inquiry spaces, the CRE fostered racial affinity and community in ways that were healing and empowering through storytelling and shared experiences of joy, resistance, and

resilience (Baker-Doyle, 2017; Catone, 2017; Kohli, Picower, Martinez, & Ortiz, 2015; Kohli, 2018; Martinez, Valdez, & Cariaga, 2016; Navarro, 2018; Richie & Wilson, 2000; Rogers, Kramer, and Mosley, 2009; Valdez et al, 2018). Similar to (Kohli et al, 2019) these women of Color educators each entered the CRE with a layered, complex, understanding of equity/inequity, a critical consciousness formed through their own social locations and ways of being in the world. As a leadership development space, the CRE did not necessarily build new critical equity skills, however, it played a vital role in the sustenance work that is integral to the continued labor and activism of justice-seeking educators of color (Kohli et al., 2019). The CRE disrupted the isolation and alienation of these critical educators, which Martinez, Valdez, and Cariaga (2016) argue is an extension of the colonial project, towards a shared racialized solidarity stemming from their identities as women of color educators.

The CRE represents a particular kind of approach to teacher-driven networks and organizations. While these teacher networks and organizations are essential to the sustenance and survival of critical educators and educators of color, they still largely promote an individual approach to leadership based on educators bringing their knowledge back to their respective schools, districts, and communities. For example, in a model like ITOC (Institute for Teacher of Color) educators came from across the country to be part of a learning community that provided resources and support but ultimately relied on the agency of individuals to enact change in their home contexts (Kohli et al., 2020). This labor of educators having to go outside of their formal professional settings in order to sustain their justice-oriented goals can be particularly taxing (Gorski & Chen, 2015). Given the existing lack of leadership opportunities for educators of color in their schools and districts and calls for more opportunities to directly influence policy and practice (Kohli, 2018; Kohli & Pizarro, 2016), this approach of developing individual leaders

outside of a formal system towards impacting formal systems may be insufficient for sustainable systemic change.

Instead, CRE is an example of a women of color-driven leadership space cultivated within a school system and intentionally towards equity-focused systems change. These educators learned "the system" to develop a critique of their specific context, in which they are all participating, and developed their leadership activity in relation to each other and the challenges of Seattle Public Schools. It was an effort that prioritized their collective knowledge and agency. Further, they enacted their leadership from within the system instead of "partnering" with or pushing from outside the formal system. As an official center within the teachers union they had a formalized leadership role and a pathway, largely through the collective bargaining agreement, to district-level decision-making. In this way, the CRE provided a distinct opportunity for women of color educators to directly and collectively enact leadership.

Towards the role of teachers unions in equity-focused reforms more broadly, the CRE coaches in my study expressed little interest or loyalty to the union writ large, more often understanding the organization itself to be a white space with coded rules and lacking in authentic racial equity priorities. However, the CRE's location within the union did, as Bascia (2000) suggests, afford an organizing structure, resources, and opportunity to share knowledge and work across schools. Further, CRE goals of elevating educator voice, influence, and agency in schools and the district were congruent with existing union logics and priorities, or in CHAT terms the organization's "rules" (Engeström, 2001). Embedding the center within the union legitimized SEA's public commitments to racial equity while also maintaining a sense of autonomy from SPS and control over the work.

Additionally, the CRE's focus on district-level leadership set it apart from other union-based initiatives. For example, the social justice unionism literature that draws on the work of radical caucuses within unions primarily center efforts on union transformation or building diverse labor and community coalitions (Anyon, 2014; Uetricht, 2014; Weiner, 2012). The SEE (Social Equality Educators) caucus within SEA had similar dynamics and strategies to other caucuses around the country. For instance, the caucus ran various members for formal leadership positions in SEA in an attempt to take over the union (though unsuccessful), a practice learned from places like Chicago, Philadelphia, and Baltimore (Alter, 2013; Maton, 2016; Riley, 2019; Shiller & Caucus, 2020; Stark, 2019). Coaches shared how the SEE caucus was too broad and more socialism focused, employing traditional labor organizing tactics of building power and holding leaders accountable for issues such as climate change and income inequality, employing a theory of change based on securing policy "wins" (Alinsky, 1971). Even though the SEE caucus spurred the Black Lives Matter at School events and curriculum (Charney, Hagopian, & Peterson, 2021), an initiative that all of the coaches had engaged in, these racial equity-focused efforts were interspersed with a myriad of other agenda items that may have detracted from a singular mission of centering the needs of racial justice-focused educators in the classroom.

Additionally, CRE coaches noted how the SEE caucus was "white" and "male," and named the patriarchy and microaggressions they faced as women of color in that space. As noted by Shiller & Caucus (2020) in Baltimore, without the concerted effort of slow and intentional relationship building and explicit prioritization of racial equity, these spaces can be co-opted by white liberal teachers. As in Seattle, the mission of social justice rooted in a white male socialist framework, particularly in absence of the race-conscious process, eventually led to the alienation of the critical women of color educators the caucus hoped to engage. As a result, the CRE served

as an alternative to existing union (and district) structures, offering a new site of collective leadership with clear racial equity-driven values and a theory of change centered on system-change through the elevation of women of color expertise.

Racialized Boundaries Constrain Transformative Agency

Boundaries are consequential to learning activity (Akkerman & Bakker, 2011; Engeström, 2001, Keruso, 2011) as they are sites of contestation and negotiation towards new learning. In this study, the collective bargaining agreement formalized a partnership between CRE and ED creating a potential new boundary space to develop shared racial equity-focused objects. However, without structures and processes to authentically engage in joint-work, the boundary between CRE and ED was largely maintained. Even though the CRE had contractual policy language that designated them as partners with ED, there was already an existing power dynamic and a significant difference in capacity that meant the CRE was unable to exert the same level of influence as the district. For example, the CRE coaches only met a handful of times during the year in addition to their full-time teaching positions instead of being full-time employees like ED. ED staff each coached around 14 equity teams, whereas CRE coaches each coached a single school. And importantly, the RET professional development days were largely organized, planned, and staffed by ED, even though the CRE wanted more voice in decision-making. There was a structural problem of the racial equity initiatives being traditionally district work and a lack of capacity and opportunity for CRE to fully realize their aims of shaping those conversations and goals.

Critically, that boundary between CRE and ED was not only power-laden but also racialized. As Ray (2019) defines,

> racialized organizations [are] meso-level social structures that limit the personal agency and collective efficacy of subordinate racial groups while magnifying the agency of the dominant racial group. The ability to act upon the world, to create, to learn, to express

> emotion—indeed, one's full humanity—is constrained (or enabled) by racialized organizations. (p. 36)

The CRE's desire to lead systems change was not simply a union's effort to exert more influence in education policy and practice, but rather an important opportunity to elevate and legitimize a vision of racial equity leadership built from the knowledge and expertise of women of color. The CRE had become a counter-space to the whiteness of the district. Through the union they were recognized as leaders, circumventing the hierarchical structure and credentialing process of district leadership. Within the CRE, coaches frequently discussed the "re-whitening" and "course correcting," practices of the district to create barriers to authentic racial equity work and maintain the (white) status quo. Particularly through Charise's role, CRE coaches had a critical historical understanding of the way the system would always re-instantiate its power and their efforts to make change were always racialized within that context. However, without explicit conversations between the district and the CRE and recognition of this racialized and powered dynamic or structures and processes to intervene, or as Vikkunen (2006) states, to break from a given frame in order to transform it, the racialized boundaries were never disrupted and the CRE's ability to exert transformative agency was constrained.

Further, even though the CRE was created as a union initiative to champion educator-driven leadership, the CRE's primary leadership activities were to fill a void in district leadership capacity. For instance, the original object of CRE leadership activity was to support educators on newly formed RETs who were feeling unsupported by the district. Similarly, educators' dissatisfaction with district professional development provided the impetus for the CRE to create and facilitate their own PD workshops. Filling these gaps were important opportunities for the CRE to exercise their leadership, however, they were also replicating the district by slotting themselves into an established and prescribed, district-driven model. While there were a few

occasions when the CRE spoke about forgetting about the district or prioritizing their goals as women of color racial equity educator-leaders, this dynamic of constructing their leadership activities in reaction to the district persisted. For example, when educators were expressing confusion around the district-mandated action plan, Charise attempted to discuss strategies with the coaches of how they could support teams in reaching their goals. Her intention was to de-center the district compliance tool of the action plan and instead center the wisdom of the coaches. However, the coaches re-centered the action plan itself as the primary problem that needed to be addressed. As a result, the coaches decided to disregard the district mandate and agreed to tell teams to ignore the tool. This was a powerful moment from the CRE where they exhibited collective agency and resistance, however, it was also narrowly limited to a specific district tool that potentially distracted them from a more expansive conversation that may have imagined something different. As a result, their attempts to determine the CRE's work beyond the current system remained limited by the existing structures and opportunities and kept recentering the district in their work.

The collective bargaining process provided a particularly powerful example of the limitations of relying on existing structures and district-centered approaches. Specifically, the bargaining process heightened the power dynamics and entrenched racialized boundaries, in particular the union-district boundary, and shaped the agency (and perception of agency) of the CRE. As the bargain approached, I observed the CRE take up the logics and assumptions of the broader union as they prepared to engage in a familiar and oppositional interest-based power paradigm. As Ray (2019) contends, "agency is a temporal relationship, as actors plan according to past experiences and future hopes" (p. 36). For the CRE, they recognized the importance of the contract in formalizing and legitimizing their leadership, as women of color educators, in the

district and union. However, the CRE's understanding of their leadership being contract dependent shaped what they imagined was possible, and in turn limited their desires around what could be negotiated for in a contract. For example, coaches shared how they dreamt the CRE could be a collective learning hub inclusive of students, families, and communities. Thus, the way the coaches privileged the contract as a starting point and ending point may have enclosed possibilities to vision and dream their own role and purpose of the CRE grounded in their collective experiences and hopes.

Politicized Trust as an Alternative Approach to Racial Justice Leadership

A fundamental takeaway from this study is the critical role of politicized trust in racial equity leadership. Specifically, the CRE enacted a model of values-driven collective leadership grounded in community, care, and a racialized solidarity. Charise, through her recruitment and relationship building, seeded the CRE as a space for the women of color leaders and provided the initial beginnings of politicized trust. Over time, that initial trust was maintained through the further development of relationships, storytelling, and collaborative leadership activities. The CRE became that site of sustenance for the coaches by honoring their racialized identities and championing a collective purpose. Importantly, this case of the CRE expands our understanding of racial justice leadership by prioritizing the relational (subject-subject) process of collective-changemaking.

However, the CRE's enactment of politicized trust as essential to racial justice leadership was perhaps at odds with ED and the district's understanding of racial justice leadership. The coaches often critiqued the districts overreliance on quantitative, student assessment data as a measure of equitable change and their logic of accountability and compliance. In the few exchanges between CRE coaches and ED staff members, coaches surfaced some of these tensions around the district's approach to RETs. For example, when ED staff consistently turned

to tools to gather data and drive action, CRE coaches interjected, asking instead for more time with their teams to build relationships beyond a single year. Coaches suggest a phase prior to the action planning tool that would focus on the "people part," prioritizing reflection, analysis of power dynamics and developing educators into racial justice leaders. While ED staff noted the coaches' suggestions, these one-off conversations did little to disrupt the district prevailing practices. As Waitoller and Artiles (2016) posit, these multiple theories of change become contradictions at the boundary, thus it becomes critical to "seize opportunities to work at the boundary" including "interrogating and redefining the notions of justice informing the partnership activity system" (p. 369). The differing theories of change between the CRE's relationship focus and ED's tool creation created conceptual tensions that remained unresolved. Thus, while the CRE attempted to partner with ED, they were not interrogating these points of contradiction at the boundary between the union and district. As a result, the CRE and ED may have had overlap in their roles as RET coaches, however, they were perhaps working towards different goals or objects.

Consequently, the individual relationships between coaches and ED staff were insufficient in the face of organizational contradictions and racialized boundaries, and particularly as their leadership activities pivoted towards securing resources through the collective bargain. While the CRE had developed a sense of politicized trust amongst themselves, this trust did not extend beyond the CRE as they engaged organizationally with ED and the broader district. For instance, the relational rupture between Charise and Elena became a harbinger of a larger struggle for district access, respect, and legitimacy. Instead, organizational dynamics and boundaries led to the CRE replicating district practices, such as the fixation on tools, and the bargaining process in particular created a stark union-district division. While the

CRE was internally putting forth an alternative vision of racial justice leadership through the development of politicized trust, the power positioning and dominant district logics prevailed in the CRE discourse and enactments.

Implications for Research

First and foremost, this dissertation affirms the importance of centering the collective experiences and agency of minoritized communities in education leadership (Bertrand & Rodela, 2017; Cooper; 2009; Ishimaru, 2018; Khalifa, 2012; Welton & Frelon, 2018). By beginning with the knowledge, histories, and priorities of women of color within the Center for Racial Equity, a new leadership paradigm emerged grounded in community, care, and trust. These educators created a counter-space to be whole and well as they engaged with the realities of racialized institutions steeped in whiteness. Their efforts illuminate an alternative and burgeoning vision that presents exciting possibilities for how we study and enact racial justice leadership. To further understand this alternative vision, future research should continue to invest in de-settling normative assumptions of expertise and re-conceptualizing who we consider leadership towards expansive approaches to justice. This includes engaging multiple theories of change and plurality of justice(s) as defined by those most impacted: specifically, students, families, communities, and educators of color who have been erased and ignored in reform efforts. While much of the literature on leadership focuses on individual leader thoughts and actions, my study particularly highlighted the racialized and relational aspects of leadership through the women of color educators' collective practice over time. Their collective leadership serves as a refusal to the white, colonial practices of schools and districts and suggests a more humanizing path, grounded in a community care centric understanding of racial equity. For researchers, this requires an explicit race consciousness that recognizes the ways collective leadership is enacted within

racialized organizations, by attending to the sociocultural contexts and relational dynamics that are enabling and constraining their transformative agency. I hope future research investigates teachers unions as these sites of collective leadership to better understand the dynamics and practices of justice-oriented change within diverse community contexts.

Further, through qualitative methodology this study surfaced challenges, contradictions, and tensions as the Center for Racial Equity attempted to shape racial equity conversations and practices within a powered and racialized system. Despite the work of the educators of color, these tensions largely persisted with roles and boundaries continuously re-inscribing themselves. As a potential solution, participatory design research offers a methodological approach to authentically engage tensions through re-making our roles and relations in the learning and design process. Such an approach also implicates researchers as integral to the change-making process as we bring our full selves, histories, and expertise to the collective endeavor. Thus, I see great potential for considering interventionist methods such as participatory design research to not only disrupt but re-mediate problematic framings, assumptions, and practices towards engaging new possibilities and paradigms (Bang & Vossoughi, 2016). Given the power dynamics and histories at play between a union and a district, these dynamics are entrenched and require explicit naming and attention through methods designed to make change in the "here and now." This could be particularly fruitful as we might expand the design process to engage minoritized students and families in the practice of co-designing and re-imagining schools and systems that prioritize the wellness of our communities (Bang et al., 2012; Booker & Goldman, 2016; DiSalvo et al., 2013; Ishimaru et al., 2018; Ishimaru & Takahashi, 2017; Zavala, 2016). PDR offers a methodology to simultaneously co-construct subject-subject and subject-object relations towards new learning.

Implications for Theory

Politicized trust, as a values-driven racial solidarity, emerged as a central feature of the CRE's racial equity leadership. While I observed politicized trust as an outcome of the coaches' collective practice, future research should investigate the ways this kind of trust is created, maintained, and sustained. Specifically, this concept has primarily been explored as an individual relational theory. Instead, this study suggests that politicized trust could be understood as a collective and organizational concept, which has important implications particularly for politically charged, power-laden, racialized organizations. A mezzo-level conceptualization of politicized trust could offer new insights and approaches to collaboration and systems-focused change.

Similarly, we may need to consider the frameworks we center to guide racial equity learning, particularly as this kind of adult learning may differ from content or disciplinary knowledge. For example, even though the CRE was developing politicized trust amongst themselves, they drew on Gorski's (2016) equity literacy framework to lead in school and district spaces. While the equity literacy framework is critical to recognizing inequities redressing these issues, it is premised on assumptions of equity literacy as a skill to be practiced, primarily by individuals. And within the CRE, the ability to name inequities signaled equity content area expertise or being designated "equity literate." However, this differed from the politicized trust they were enacting within the CRE and their desire for more relationally based theories of change, often in opposition to district logics of accountability. Thus, I wonder what it might look or feel like to design a leadership space from a theory of politicized trust, and to explicitly center a relational and humanizing framework as a racial equity leadership practice. What if professional development entailed developing, reflecting, and sustaining politicized trust? What

possibilities might emerge? As scholars and leaders this may require de-settling dominant district-centric notions of racial justice leadership grounded in the overproduction of tools and narrow notions of data. CRE shows us that there are emerging theories of racial justice leadership that center collective relationality and the building of on-going solidarities over time that work to foreground process towards equitable outcomes. And we may need to look to other theories and frameworks within and beyond education that center our intersectional identities, healing, and collective care rooted in abolition, decolonization, disability and transformative justice movements (Ginwright, 2015; Love, 2019; Maree-Brown, 2017, Piepzna-Samarasinha, 2018; Tuck & Yang, 2018). Perhaps we will develop new theories that are yet to exist to prioritize our wholeness, wellness, and pursue equity through relationality as we understand what it means to lead for justice.

Implications for policy and practice

This dissertation revealed the possibilities for teachers unions to become sites of racial justice leadership. As a center within the union, the location of the CRE provided resources, teacher-centric priorities, and a distinct pathway to district-level leadership. The creation of the CRE is a promising practice that developed from the concerted effort of a union to harness the power of their own membership and center the leadership and lived experiences of their educators of color. What we learned is this process takes time and intentionality in bringing the right people together to foster the kind of space that engenders the politicized trust I witnessed. However, the ideas and practices of the CRE were not widespread throughout the union and the center itself did not seek to transform their own institution. Even though educators with the CRE were de-siloed from their classrooms, the CRE itself was a separate silo within the union. While this kind of nurturing counter-space was essential to the wellbeing of the coaches, it also did not

disrupt the institutional whiteness that was still causing harm to themselves and other educators and kept their scope of influence more limited. As such, the CRE (or other spaces like it) alone might be insufficient to creating systemic change, and there may need to be more points of entry to influence and infuse CRE practices into the union itself.

Importantly, these types of efforts need resources and capacity to be sustainable. Charise, as the only full-time employee of the CRE, created a capacity bottleneck and an incredible amount of responsibility that was far too great for a single person. The other CRE coaches wanted more opportunities to come together and to be paid for their labor and expertise. Interestingly, there were perhaps options to pay for the CRE through union dues or grants, but the primary source of funding came from the collective bargaining agreement. The coaches felt it was the district's responsibility to pay for this work, as opposed to enacting a strategy that prioritized the union creating and sustaining itself. As a result of this structure, a union-district competitive and adversarial dynamic prevailed. Embedding the CRE within the system allowed coaches to learn the system and gain new access to the system, but it may not have meaningfully disrupted the system. What may have transpired if the CRE had pursued activities that were not aligned with broader union interests? How might the goals of racial equity be in conflict with a union's priorities? Thus, while adequate resources, capacity, and formal structures are necessary conditions to authentically engage in this work, there also needs to be shifts in the underlying logics and assumptions. For example, the collective bargaining agreement is a powerful tool for union influence, yet it constrained and shaped the goals, dynamics, and processes of the CRE.

Similarly, the CRE emerged as a space of refusal (Tuck, 2009), both in opposition to an oppressive system steeped in whiteness and patriarchy, and the creation of a place to be whole and well. However, their leadership activity began as primarily focusing on the negation of the

district, defining the CRE by what it is not, which framed the work within a well-worn district logic. That logic shapes the possibilities from the start. Instead, I wonder how the CRE may have developed if they had the time and space to engage in collective social dreaming (Espinoza, 2008) over time? How might they have understood their values, identities, and visions for justice if the work was centered on their agency and imagination, instead of narrowly fixing what is wrong in the present system?

Finally, this study illuminates challenges and tensions in racial equity focused partnerships and the need for new learning and growth for all participants. Similar to the structural issues in the CRE, the partnership between CRE and ED required more time and opportunities to gather and engage in joint-work (Engeström, 2001), to puzzle through their differing understandings of justice and create shared objects of activity. Specifically, this kind of racialized and power-laden collaboration calls for explicit naming of power dynamics and recognition of critical historicity, understanding how the past is shaping the present and future. And, in line with participatory design methodology, this new work means deconstructing and reconstructing positions, roles, and expertise, re-mediating roles and relations, in an effort to heal towards systemic repair.

Conclusion

We are living in a different world than when this study began. We are navigating an on-going global pandemic disproportionately impacting communities of color, and the Movement for Black Lives continues amidst a growing White backlash against critical race theory that has only deepened our urgency and commitments to racial justice. Educator, school, and systems leadership hold great power in shaping how we respond to and move forward in such precarious

times, and teachers unions are increasingly engaging in the fight. We have the opportunity to recognize, elevate, and catalyze their leadership.

The work of the Center for Racial Equity is a powerful example of the type of leadership that can emerge when we center the knowledge and expertise of women of color. They open possibilities for how we might imagine and enact racial justice leadership and the capacities that may need to be developed to authentically and sustainably engage in this work. Exploring the complexities and tensions in their leadership practice is by no means equating their efforts to failure. These leaders were disrupting a system of power and put forth something new. Through holding the nuance and wrestling with these tensions the hope is that we may engage in the kinds of new learning and relationships that have the potential to create a more just and equitable system that prioritizes the wellness and agency of communities of color. And this particular story is still unfolding. We are yet to know the potential impact of the Center for Racial Equity, how this work will ripple out, transform, and transcend this snapshot in space and time. Systemic transformation will take considerable time, effort, and perseverance. The Center for Racial Equity is a piece of a broader movement towards justice-oriented change, opening a site of hope and possibility.

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